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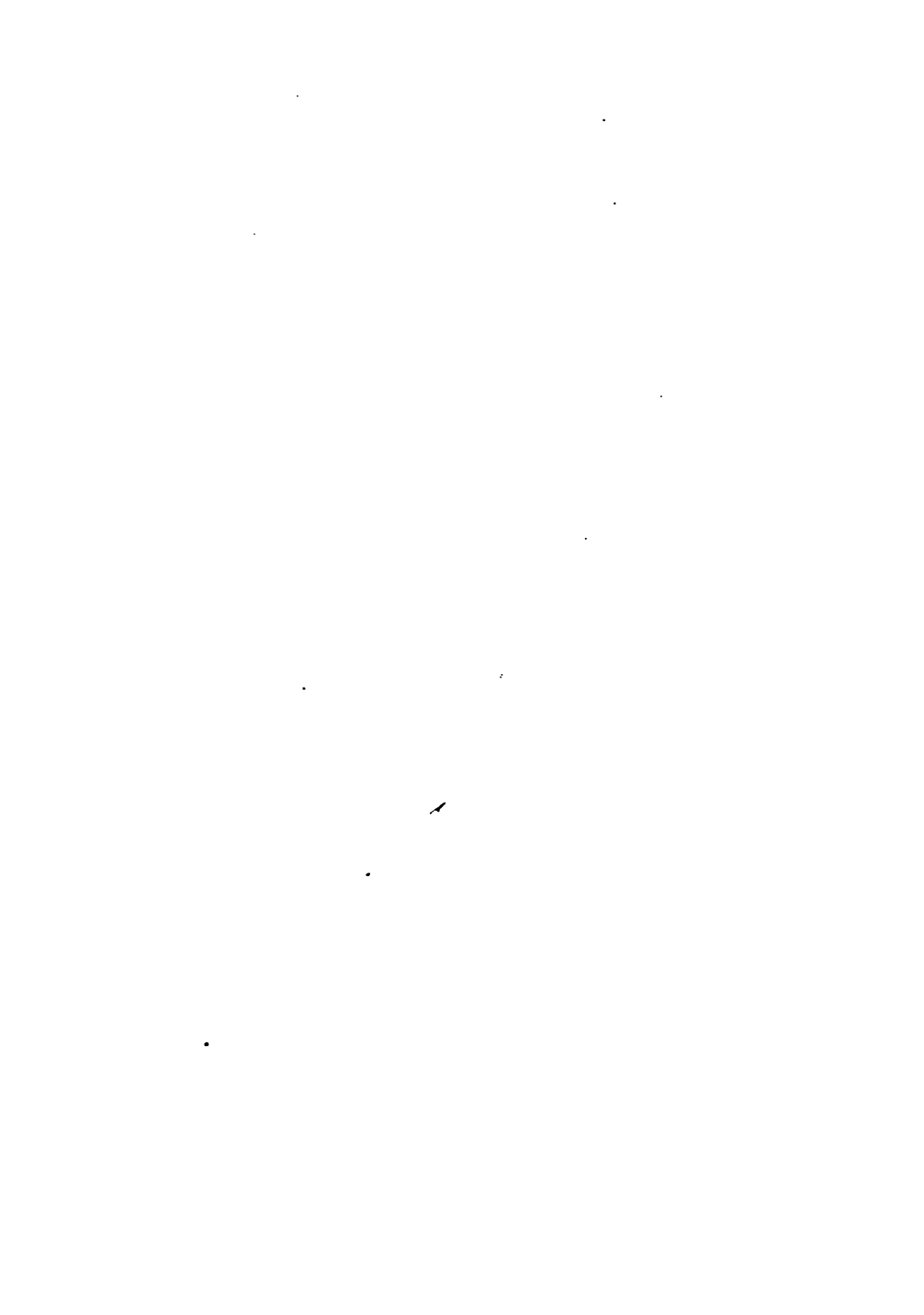
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MILLICENT KENDRICK;

OR,

THE SEARCH AFTER HAPPINESS.

BY

EMMA JANE WORBOISE,

AUTHOR OF "KINGSDOWN LODGE," "WIFE'S TRIALS AND TRIUMPHS,"
ETC., ETC.

Thou art the source and centre of all minds,
Their only point of rest : Eternal Word !
From Thee departing they are lost, and rove
At random, without honour, hope, or peace.
From Thee is all that soothes the life of man,
His high endeavour, and his glad success,
His strength to suffer, and his will to serve.
But, O Thou bounteous Giver of all good,
Thou art, of all Thy gifts, Thyself the crown :
Give what Thou can'st, without Thee we are poor ;
And with Thee rich, take what Thou wilt away.

COWPER—*The Task.*

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regardless of each other's fate, and careless even of their own, if only they may but reach and clasp the beckoning, ever-deluding phantom, whose witcheries are leading them—*whither?*

Look! Beyond the sorceress, beyond those who are dying at her very feet, there is the dark, unfathomable abyss. And over all, with brooding wings, hovers a pale, shadowy angel, with the Book of God open in his hand, and his finger pointing to these solemn words:—*The end of these things is death.*

I have been thinking lately, how sadly, and how forcibly, this wonderful allegory of the painter applies to mortal life, in every phase, every age, and every degree. From the cradle to the grave, we pursue pleasure as our chief good: we seek, and *naturally* seek, happiness, as a treasure that is beyond all price, a gem that is to be appropriated at all cost, and at every risk. Nor is the race confined to warriors, statesmen, courtiers, ecclesiastics, or gay worldlings, or to men of literature, or men of science, or men of art; for if it were, the results would be far less deplorable than they are; the victims of pleasure, *alias* happiness, would be the few, instead of the many; and those who fall into the gaping pit of destruction would stand in the memory of the multitude like warning beacons on the jutting headland of some rocky, treacherous coast.

I am going to show you how persons, who are what the world calls "nobodies," may and do run the same risks as those whom station, talent, or *circumstance* brings out into wider spheres of action.

I, Millicent Kendrick, am going to write the story of my own life, or rather some passages in it, in the hope that it will be useful to the young people who may read these pages; for you too, dear friends, are wanting, and aiming, and *longing to be happy*; and as there is but *one* veritable happiness, and a thousand imitations, you may take warning from the life experience of one, who has trodden the path of mortality—as it seems to her—almost to its close.

My childhood, as far I can remember it, was exceedingly common-place. I was not a prodigy, either of beauty, or quickness, or goodness, or naughtiness. My parents belonged to what is now called the upper middle-class of society: they were certainly not poor; but they were by no means rich enough to warrant a lavish expenditure of their means; and I, one of six children, knew little of indulgences, and still less of harshness, neglect, or privation. And yet I suppose I was tolerably happy, and believed my home to be the most favoured spot in all the world; I know I did, in after days.

I was ten years old, when I first became distinctly conscious of the strong, yearning desire of my soul after happiness; and here is my first experience of a search that has occupied the greater part of my life.

I was sent to school near London; and though at first the bare idea of leaving home and going among strangers was inexpressibly painful, I soon recovered my cheerfulness, and grew quite contented with my lot. I remember the journey in the inside of the "*Eagle*" coach, under the special protection of the

guard; the arrival at the inn, where I found Miss Cecilia Johnson waiting to take charge of me and of my luggage; the reaching Hammersmith in the chilly dusk of a January evening; the alighting at Agenoria House, and reading on the large brass door-plate, by the rays of the moon, "The Misses Johnson's Establishment."

My governess took me by the hand, and led me up the door-step, and presently we were ushered in by a trim waiting-maid, and uproariously greeted by a small black and tan spaniel, who barked and grinned at me in most savage fashion, and almost upset Miss Cecilia—who was of very diminutive stature—by leaping upon her, in token of his satisfaction at her return. Then I was introduced to Miss Johnson, and Miss Lucretia Johnson, and Mademoiselle Girardot, the French governess; and finally I was taken up-stairs, by a tall, sallow girl, who eyed me from head to foot, as if I had been an Aztec, or the "infant Sappho." There I was shown my bed, and instructed to put my bonnet away in a long, dark closet, where hung, at least, twenty more bonnets, and informed that the getting-up bell rang at six o'clock, and that no talking was permitted in the bed-rooms—intelligence which in no way contributed to my satisfaction.

My introduction to the school-room was truly appalling; forty girls were sitting at tea at two long tables, and they all surveyed me with the closest attention. The fire seemed about half a mile from my seat, and the feeble light of the dip candles

scarcely penetrated to my end of the table, where a mug of milk and water, and two huge slices of bread and butter, were assigned me, as my portion of the repast. After tea, lessons were learned, and no word was permitted to be spoken; and as the meal had passed in unbroken silence, and as I could not suppose that conversation would be tolerated in school-hours, I was quite puzzled to know when our tongues would be allowed their natural licence.

Then came supper—bread and treacle, which I had always abominated, and toast and water, which gave me the idea of its having been prepared by the cask; and then prayers, which were something entirely new to me; and then undressing in an atmosphere that made me shiver, by the rays of a rushlight, placed in a stand of lantern-like construction; and, lastly, my pillow, by the side of one of my school-fellows, who never spoke to me, and whom I did not venture to address—where I cried myself to sleep, in true orthodox fashion.

The next day, however, made a wonderful difference to my feelings; I had recovered the fatigue of my journey; and the hot bread and milk at breakfast revived me considerably. By-and-by, I had my place in class assigned me; I was told to take possession of certain new books; and in due time I fraternized with some of the girls, and loved them amazingly; and, somehow, I did not care about little hardships, as many children do, for I had never been petted at home, and there was so much to learn, and so many duties to perform, and so many

ardent friendships to cultivate, that I really found no time to be miserable; and, in my first letter home, written a fortnight after my arrival, I informed "my dear parents" that I was "quite well, and very happy, and trusting to improve my advantages to the utmost of my ability."

I do not recollect much about that, my first half-year at Agenoria House; sometimes I was idle, and sometimes I was diligent; sometimes I was punished, and sometimes I was praised; for the most part, the months passed uneventfully away, though I formed many new habits, gained many new ideas, and acquired a tolerable stock of miscellaneous information.

The last few weeks of the half-year, however, I studied with unwonted care and application; for a spirit of contest possessed me the moment we began to prepare for our semi-annual examination. In a few days I stood at the head of my class, and received encomiums from my governesses. Miss Johnson displayed the elaborate sampler I had just finished; Miss Cecilia praised my improvement in writing, and handed to Miss Lucretia the neatly-ruled account-book, where my sums, up to long division, were entered; and Mademoiselle bore witness to the superior correctness of the French exercise, which had been given to the whole class, as a test of progress.

Already I was supremely happy; but on the breaking-up night, when there was a ball and a concert, *I was wildly elate*: even now, I have not ceased

wondering that I did not commit some awful solecism, some dreadful breach of rules, that would have cast me down "from a seventh heaven into a snow-wreath."

I was attired in a white muslin frock, with a blue sash, and shoes of the same cerulean hue; I danced a minuet amidst universal applause; I played "The Guaracha" and "In my cottage near a wood," without a single mistake; and, to crown all, there was a grand supper—custards, jam tarts, and lemonade. And afterwards, when we mingled freely with the company, I was praised yet more highly for my dancing, and extolled for my playing, and flattered about my rosy cheeks and my pretty flaxen curls; till my head grew dizzy with applause, and I became greedy of compliments for which I had never cared before; and I said to myself, as I stood a little apart, watching the festive scene, "This is being happy!"

I dare say all this seems very childish; but I am writing of childish days, and I cannot omit it, because I am conscious that my search after happiness really began that very evening. I then, for the first time, distinctly recognized the *need* of happiness; and I laid down, in my childish mind, my first schemes for attaining that which seemed to me clearly the chief end of existence. Of course my standard, and the way I was to reach it, were proportionate to my juvenile experience.

Well! the evening came to a close, the guests departed, and we were ordered off to bed without

further delay. But sleep was the last thing we contemplated, for, all discipline being suspended, as was customary when the examinations were once fairly over, we fell into a delightful strain of conversation. There were the agreeable reminiscences of the evening to recount, and there were the joyful anticipations of the morrow to keep us awake; for in the hall stood our boxes duly packed and corded, and some of us expected our friends very soon after breakfast. So we chatted, and told each other our plans for the holidays, till the brief summer night waned, and the grey dawn began to glimmer.

My bed-fellow was a girl named Frances Fielding; she was a few months older than myself, and I thought her rather too grave, and too precise, in her general conduct and attention to rules; on the whole, she was not a favourite in the house; yet, though I wished her merrier and less punctilious, I think I liked her, and had some dim idea that she was very religious. One by one the occupants of the other beds fell asleep, and Frances and myself alone remained wakeful.

"I wish it were morning," I said; "time to get up. I wish breakfast and prayers were over, and you and I at the landing window, watching for the carriages. Oh, I mean to be so happy all the holidays; we are to have such treats all this mid-summer! Harry has got rabbits, and I am to go shares with him, and to ride on the donkey as often and as long as I like; and we are to have a gipsying to Marston Woods, and perhaps—I don't

say *quite*—perhaps we shall go to the sea while I am at home. Oh, I do mean to be so happy: there is nothing in the world like being happy; I do wish to-morrow were come!”

“To-morrow *is* come!” said Frances, in a quiet tone, that contrasted strangely with my quick, excited talk; “see; it is getting quite light. I could count the tassels on the curtain, and I hear the birds singing quite loud.”

“Ah, but the going home!” I replied; “I mean that, Frances; I don’t call it to-morrow till the getting-up bell rings.”

For a few minutes there was silence, and I said, “Frances, are you going to sleep?”

“No,” she replied, gravely: “I was only thinking of what Miss Stevenson worked upon her sampler.”

“What makes you think of that now?” I answered. “Why, she worked nearly everything on it: there was a border of roses, and lots of trees, and a house, and a bird with red wings and a blue tail, as well as all the alphabet and the figures, and her name and the date at the bottom.”

“There was something else; don’t you remember?” said my companion.

“Ah! yes! it said ‘Worked at Agenoria House;’ that is on mine too, and on the best samplers, that are to be framed.”

“I did not mean that,” returned Frances; “there was a text out of the Bible: ‘Boast not thyself of to-morrow, for thou knowest not what a day may bring forth.’”

I wished Frances had not said it; it gave me a most

unpleasant feeling of insecurity; in a moment there was a sense of something undefined, and impending, which marred the happiness in which I had been rejoicing; there was a drop of bitterness in my cup of pleasure; the draught was no longer unmingled. But as I began to think about it, I fell asleep; and in what appeared to me to be the space of five minutes, the bell rang forth its noisy peal, and it was time to arise: the real to-morrow was come.

It was a fair and sunny morning—I never remember a brighter; the meadows were green and flowery, the river sparkling in the glad, summer sunshine, and the trees in the garden waved gently in the soft, sweet, southern breeze. We gathered together in the school-room, and prayers were hastily read. Breakfast followed, but everybody was too much excited to have any appetite, although Miss Johnson declared that no young lady, refusing her bread and butter, should be allowed to go home that day.

The carriages soon began to arrive, and one after another were borne away from the precincts of Agnorina House. As Frances Fielding took her departure, the remembrance of the text she had quoted came afresh into my mind, and I felt quite provoked; but then I comforted myself with reflecting that to-morrow had become to-day, and that I would refrain from any further boasting.

All were gone but two or three, who, to their disgust and mortification, were left the last, and I was one of the number. I had just begun to feel out of *all* patience, and to debate with myself whether

I should be fetched at all, and to wonder whether there had been any mistake about the day, when one of the elder girls, who also remained, came to tell me that Miss Johnson wished to speak to me.

I went down-stairs, wishing that it had been settled for me to go by coach, and entered the dining-room, where Miss Johnson was standing with a letter in her hand, and a very grave countenance.

I cannot now, after the lapse of years, recollect what she said to me, or how she told me the sad truth; but I understood that my holidays were to be spent at Agenoria House. The small-pox had broken out in our village; my two sisters had taken it, and were both dangerously ill, and I was not to go home for fear of infection.

I felt the blow as keenly as I have felt deeper sorrow since; it was my first sorrow—

“To such there seemeth no to-morrow!”

I scarcely heard the words of consolation proffered by my governess, or the promise that I should have plenty of nice story-books, and spend my time exactly as I pleased. I was glad when she was called away, and I ran through the open window, which opened on the grass plot, across the trim garden, and into the solitary play-ground. There I threw myself on a bench, and covering my face with my hands, that I might not see the waving trees, and the happy sunlight, I cried, in the anguish of my heart:—“I will never try to be happy again!” My whole soul sickened as I acknowledged that, in very truth, *we can never know what a day may bring forth.*

CHAPTER II.

"COMING OUT."

At length I got unto the gladsome hill,
Where lay my hope,
Where lay my heart; and, climbing still,
When I had gained the brow and top,
A lake of brackish waters on the ground
Was all I found.

GEORGE HERBERT.

As this is a tale for grown-up people as well as for their juniors, I will not inflict upon my readers many more reminiscences of my school-days; I will pass over seven years, which I spent at Agenoria House, and come to my final "breaking-up day," when I returned home "for good," as young people say, when they have done with grammars and histories, and all the apparatus of juvenile study.

Seven years, then, had passed away since I lay sobbing under the trees in the play-ground, making my childish moan over the happiness that had eluded my grasp. I was no longer "little Milly," but Miss Kendrick, a young lady of seventeen, whose education was supposed to be finished, and whose introduction into society was just about to take place.

And, as regarded apparent and decided changes in my lot and character, the seven years had been, for the most part, uneventful, and I marked them chiefly by the girls who had come and gone during that period, and by my own standing in the school; and now they

were over, my school-days had come to a close, and on the morrow I was going home "*for good.*"

I was walking alone in one of the alleys of the large garden, looking at one of my prizes, a splendid green and gold volume, entitled, "Letters to a Young Lady on her Entrance into the World." And somehow the chain of thought lengthened itself out most incomprehensibly; I went back to the early days of my residence at Agenoria House, and I began forthwith to take an involuntary and impartial retrospect of my school-life, that was already almost a thing of the past.

Tranquil as it had been in outward seeming, it had been far from happy; there had always been a skeleton in some hidden cupboard; always a Mordecai at my gates. I had given general satisfaction, to my friends and to my governesses; I had grown up by no means a beauty, but yet a very nice-looking girl, with abundance of bright, curling brown hair, dark grey eyes, and white, clear skin, and round, rosy cheeks; a nose the least bit snub, a broad chin, and a large mouth, saved me entirely from the dangerous distinction of being really *pretty*. My father, too, had become richer, and occupied a higher position than in my childish days; and I knew that I was going to make my *début* with advantages superior to those which the greater part of my school-fellows would be likely to enjoy. My father lived now in a handsome, square, stone-built house, surrounded on all sides by a well-kept garden; there was a *smooth-shaven* lawn, with a splendid copper

beech in the midst thereof: there was a broad carriage-drive, a paddock, and a dozen trees in a corner, supposed to be a shrubbery. Moreover, we kept two maid-servants and a man, and my mother was proud of her pony-phæton, and of her silver forks—not much to be proud of, you will say. No, not much at any time, for equipage and appointments are poor things to glory in, whether they be in the positive or in the superlative degree: but even supposing that carriages, and plate, and their usual concomitants, *are* things to make much of, there seems, I dare say, very little to boast of in the “one-horse shay,” as some of our neighbours unkindly called the phæton, and the dozen silver forks, that always came out with the finger-glasses and the table-napkins, on festal occasions.

Yes; but things are altered of late years; a taste for expense and luxury has been gradually growing upon us; and what was considered quite sufficient and highly *genteel*, in by-gone times, would now be voted, even by the classes we consider far beneath us, inconvenient, sordid, rough, and vulgar.

My father, too, was churchwarden, and latterly a magistrate, both very honourable offices in those days, as, I doubt not, they still are; only, churchwardens and magistrates, like authors and philosophers, were not so numerous then as now, and the public brain possessed and cultivated the organ of veneration much more largely than is commonly the case in our times.

But to return to my retrospect. I had always

been *going to be so happy*, and yet never attaining the ultimatum of my desires. I am one of those who possess the sweet but perilous gift of loving to excess. Even in childhood I loved passionately or not at all; and on this tender, nay, sacred point, I had been sorely wounded several times during my school-days. It seemed, even then, to be my lot "to make idols, and to find them clay, and to bewail that worship," and a very painful, wearying lot I found it.

How deeply I loved those on whom I set my childish and my youthful affections! How my heart yearned for their love; and how unsatisfactory were all other sources of joy, if that which I so intensely desired were withheld! Oh! if I had but known there was *One* waiting to fill that aching heart with a peace that passeth all understanding—with a bliss that grows ever purer and fuller, until it receives its consummation in the world where "sorrow and sighing shall flee away!"

In one way or another, I was continually disappointed in these my girlish friendships; I could fill a little book with their histories; and with the narrations of the wrongs I suffered in reality and in imagination: but I am afraid, though it might be very amusing, it would scarcely be profitable; and I hold that our lightest reading ought to be to some good purpose.

My first love was Nelly Leigh, a charming little class-mate of my own age; I never left her side if I could help it; I shared with her everything I had; and if I could have undergone all her punish-

ments—for she was a wild little pussy, always in some kind of scrape—and if I could have transferred to her all my own good marks and rewards, I would willingly have done so. For a few weeks I fancied my affection was fully returned; but at the quarter there was a new arrival, a certain Louisa Mortimer, who gradually insinuated herself into Nelly's good graces, while I was quietly and heartlessly discarded.

All the girls said "it was a shame!" and "if they were Milly Kendrick, *they* wouldn't care a straw about such a changeable, fickle, good-for-nothing little thing." But I did care, nevertheless; I sorrowed so much, that my studies were neglected, and I got into trouble; and for a little while my health suffered, and I felt sure I should never be happy any more.

Time, the consoler, however, laid his kindly hand on these early wounds, and they bled less and less, till they healed over, and I felt the anguish no longer; but they did not close without a scar, that remained for many and many a day after I had resigned myself to be neglected and unloved by Nelly Leigh. Poor Nelly Leigh! her dear friends at Agenoria House were countless, their names were legion; and at last it became a rule to warn every new comer against the advances of that winning, coaxing, *fickle* Nelly Leigh. She grew up to be a coquette and a flirt; rumour blazoned about her conquests, for she was very lovely to look upon, and an heiress to boot, and she sang like a nightingale; and rumour declared that breaking hearts

was her pastime; but at last—I don't know how—her own heart was broken, and she died in the flower of her age. I saw her grave the other day; a poor, neglected, forlorn place it was, in a little churchyard on the southern coast, where she went as a last resource for lengthening out the weary days of a wasted, blighted life.

My next beloved friend was Jane Temple, the cleverest girl in the school. I loved her from the day of her arrival; she was so well-bred, so accomplished, and she knew so many things; and oh, unexampled honour and felicity! I was for a whole half-year her chosen and especial friend. We studied together, of course; we learned duetts together; we worked the same embroidery patterns; we were *Hermia* and *Helena*. And one thing I unquestionably owe to Jane Temple—and if she is living I hope she may read these pages, and know it; I have no idea where she is, but I believe she married and went to Australia—to her I owe my love of study, and habits of perseverance, which, till the period of my intimacy with her, were certainly undeveloped, if indeed they existed at all.

For one half-year I enjoyed without let or hindrance the friendship of Jane Temple. Then we separated for the holidays, and during the five weeks of our absence from Hammersmith, we corresponded as often as our finances and postal arrangements, unblest by Rowland Hill, would permit; I know that I counted the hours till we should meet again. *For several reasons, which it is unnecessary to specify*

here, I remained some days longer than the allotted term of vacation, and, when I went back to school, I found the larger portion of the young ladies assembled. I hastened to seek out Jane Temple, and I soon found her in the music-room, where the elder girls frequently sat, out of school hours.

Quick as true affection always is to discern the slightest change in the object of its regard, I felt, even before I saw it, an alteration in Jane's manner; she was cordial, but not familiar; kind, but not loving. My heart sank within me as I noted the symptoms of growing indifference and consequent alienation.

Jane had brought back with her a new pupil, a talented, showy girl of sixteen, who became a general favourite in the house, from the day of her arrival; and to her my friend transferred the attentions, the interest, and the demonstrations of affection which for the last six months had been exclusively my own. Once more I found myself forsaken—once more I experienced all the bitterness of slighted love.

This cruel disappointment happened when I was little more than fifteen, and Jane's desertion well-nigh broke my heart. It was not only that she had ceased to love me, but that I could no longer count her worthy of *my* first love. My queen was dethroned; my idol fallen from her pedestal. Still, in this case, I rallied before I fretted myself out of health. Pride came to my aid, and I determined that the faithless Jane should never know what *misery* she had inflicted; and in endeavouring to

room of good cheer, I gradually became more resigned, if not actually content.

Henceforth I determined to eschew the affections altogether. I made up my mind that they were essentially detrimental to happiness, injurious to one's peace of mind; so I concluded to try some new source of abiding pleasure—I resolved to try *ambition*.

So I devoted myself to my studies—I gave nothing else a thought—morning, noon, or night. I was always plunged in a sea of histories, grammars, dictionaries, and general literature. I asked and obtained leave to learn Latin, a very rare accomplishment in those days, when it was considered a proof of superior education to be able to translate “*Télémaque* ;” and finding out one day that Miss Lucretia Johnson was a Latin scholar, and had gone through the Greek grammar, I coaxed, and begged, and teased her, and gave her no peace, till she finally consented to indoctrinate me in the learned languages, on condition that I kept my classical studies a profound secret, as something altogether contraband, and out of keeping with femininity. She, on her part, declared that my Latin lessons should never go down in the bill. So I perfected myself in French literature, and affected the society of Mademoiselle, in order to improve my accent, and catch the idiom of the language. I set to work at Italian and Latin; I took lessons in perspective, practised double hours, and underwent voluntary examinations in sundry grave tomes, that had not been taken out of the

school library in the memory of any girl in the house. And as I believed that it was my hapless fate never to be truly and wholly loved, so I resolved to be happy *without* love; I would be admired, esteemed, respected; I would depend upon my own resources, and find within myself all that was essential to happiness.

"And I cannot be false to myself," I said consolingly: "if I cannot find that which I seek in one direction, I will look for it in another; and I believe that knowledge, like Nature, 'never did betray the heart that loved her.' I will cultivate my intellect, and control my affections—I must, *I will be happy.*" And visions of authorship, and fame, and glory, flitted before my young, foolish imagination, and I looked back proudly and disdainfully on certain sentimental passages to which I have alluded.

And, for a time, I believed that I really had found the secret of happiness; I was quite independent of friends and allies; I hugged my new-born content to my heart, and I wrapped myself in a delicious calmness, and rejoiced in the comfortable self-appreciation, that was, for the time being, as satisfactory as it was egotistical and delusive.

At length, however, though I would by no means admit it, even to myself, my studious pursuits began to pall upon my taste; I felt, at times, weary, disappointed, empty, and very nearly disgusted. By degrees these feelings grew upon me, and though I toiled on, it was with a kind of dreary, mechanical *resolution*, that gave me neither comfort nor pleasure.

Once more my life was aimless and objectless; a long grey vista stretched before me, in dim gloomy perspective, and I shrank back, chilled, saddened, and well-nigh hopeless. I looked within, and there was the old void, the old inexpressible yearning, the old craving for some substantial joy, whereon my baffled, weary heart might feed and be satisfied.

Thank God, I was not, *could not be satisfied*—thank God, no one ever is satisfied, who seeks to quench his thirst at broken cisterns of earth; who is content to lean on reeds of mortality, that fail him in the hour of need, and pierce him through with many sorrows; who tries to grasp that in the creature, which is to be found only in the Creator! Brackish and uncertain are the waters of human life, illusive as Dead Sea apples are the purest and most ecstatic joys of unsanctified mortality;—

“He builds too low who builds beneath the skies.”

But now, a new phase of existence was opening before me. Childhood had passed away, and the time was come for me to be a woman among women. I was standing, *not* “with reluctant feet, where the brook and river meet.” I was eager to begin life; to try “society,” as it is commonly understood. And I thought, as I paced for the last time the garden walks of Agenoria House, “Perhaps in the whirl of pleasure, in the honied tones of flattery, in the festal music, in the gay wreaths and costly robes of fashionable life, I *may* at last be happy! *Why raise for myself Utopian and unattainable*

standards? I have tried, already, friendship and learning; I have tried them in all sincerity and singleness of heart; and the past is a blank—a mistake—a page of my life's history to which I shall never in future years care to revert. Now I will try pleasure." So I said farewell to the old roomy school-house, to the pleasant gardens, to my kind governesses, and to my companions; and, with a heart beating high with hope and anticipation, I commenced my homeward journey.

At the half-way stage, I was met, according to a little plan of our own that had grown into custom, by my eldest brother, now eighteen years of age, and destined for the clerical profession. In the joy of meeting, and in the sanguine hilarity of my revived spirits, I did not at first notice how very grave and care-worn he looked. We were alone inside the coach, and after a time I began to mark his dull, absent manner, and his weary aspect. I wondered if he had been studying too hard, for he was growing fast, and far from strong. But presently, as I looked further, a sickening fear stole over me, for I caught his sad, compassionate gaze fixed on my face, and it was all I could do to falter out, "Oh, Harry! what is it? Is any one sick—*dead*?"

"No, no; not that, Milly," he answered hastily; "but, Milly dear, can you bear to hear very bad news?"

"Yes," I replied, quite calmly; "tell me the worst."

"*Our father is ruined—he has failed—you know*

what that means. We shall have to leave our pleasant home, and everything is going to be sold; it belongs to the creditors, and we shall be quite poor people. We must all learn to work; I shall never go back to Cambridge; the little ones can have no more money spent on their education—it is well that yours is complete—and poor mother is almost broken-hearted.”

The coach rolled steadily along; the sun shone in his noontide splendour; the birds sang as sweetly as when I had listened to them hours before, in the bright early summer morning. The flowers were as lovely, the skies as blue, the world as beautiful as ever on that fair June day; but the sun of my life was darkly and heavily clouded; the flowers were unheeded, the music jarring and discordant, and I was saying to myself, ever and anon, “Vanity of vanities, all is vanity. All is vanity and vexation of spirit.”

CHAPTER III.

MY AUNT RYLAND.

Filled is life's goblet to the brim:
And though my eyes with tears are dim
I see its sparkling bubbles swim,
And chant a melancholy hymn,
With solemn voice and slow.

LONGFELLOW.

It was late in the afternoon when I reached my home. There it stood in the sweet summer sunshine, with the honeysuckle in full flower about the porch, and the mignonnette boxes on the window ledges redolent with perfume, and the long shadows of the copper beech-tree on the smooth emerald lawn. And all was bright and calm, as if no weight of care and sorrow weighed down the hearts of those who called that pleasant spot their home.

I saw my mother standing at the parlour window, and she smiled a sad, faint smile of welcome, and came slowly out to meet me. She seemed much older than when I parted from her scarcely five months before; her dark luxuriant hair, which had scarcely shown a single streak of grey, was now abundantly silvered, and there were lines of care on her brow and about her mouth that I had never seen before. In January, I left my mother, a handsome comely matron, all pleasantries and contentment and kindly generosity; in June, I returned to find her a faded, saddened

woman, sinking apparently into a premature old age. She came on to the gravel walk, and took me in her arms and began to cry bitterly; hers was not a nature to cope with difficulties in a reversed position, and in time of trouble tears always came more readily than words, and words more readily than actions. Life had been to her a quiet, unbroken current—a calm, pleasant tale, with here and there little episodes of joy. It was too late now to begin the struggle, which was entirely alien to her disposition; and I saw at once that what was to be *done* must be achieved by myself and my eldest brother and sister; for I had been told already that my father was entirely crushed.

Rose and Susan met me in the hall; they were little altered, only they were grown and looked grave; Rose especially was rapidly developing into the woman.

"Oh! Milly, I am so glad you are come," said my elder sister, when she and I were in our own room; "it has been such a time—and yet, bad as it has been, the worst is yet to come."

"Tell me all about it," I said, sitting down on the side of my bed; "there will be just time before tea is ready."

"Yes, if I begin directly; but Susan is so quick, she gets the meals while you and I would be thinking about it."

"But why does Susan trouble herself with such things? Doing servants' work will not mend matters."

"*You don't understand, Milly. I wanted to write*

to you; but mamma would not allow it, and she even cautioned Harry not to tell you too much; she said 'it would be quite soon enough for the sorrow to come upon you, when it could be kept away no longer.' But the fact is we have no regular servant now; Sally Timmins comes in every morning to do the hard work, and the very dirty work; but everything else we do ourselves."

I was not prepared for this, and I felt inclined to follow my mother's example, and relieve myself by a hearty good cry; but I thought better of it, and asked if such a measure were really necessary.

"Quite necessary—at least I suppose so; but I do not think we should have thought of it, if Susan had not proposed it in the first instance. She said, it would be wisest to begin to retrench immediately, and that we had better pay cook and Jane their wages, and let them go. And really, it has not been so bad as I anticipated; the cooking is the worst part, especially now, when we have to practise economy in trifles even."

"But when did this begin? How did it all happen?"

"How it happened I cannot tell," said Rose, "for I do not understand business matters, neither does mamma; but, from what papa says, we gather that he has been unfortunate in speculations, that he has made bad debts; and one thing we all know—the bank at Radenham has stopped payment, and papa had money in it, and shares as well. It has *been going on some time*—all the spring, indeed;

and poor papa has been very low-spirited, and sometimes rather cross—and no wonder, with so much on his mind, and keeping it all to himself. When you wrote home, in April, about having a new silk dress, and mamma asked him for the money, he seemed at first quite put about, and inclined to refuse; but all of a sudden he changed his tone, and gave mamma some notes, and told her to get us all new dresses, for we might as well have them while we could; and they would keep us decent till we could manage to buy our clothes with our own money. I thought what he said was very strange; and mamma was quite puzzled: Susan was the only one who had an idea of his meaning; but she did not dare to say anything about it to any one but myself; and I am sorry to say I only laughed at her, and told her she was always finding out some wonderful thing or other. She was not angry, but she said nothing more. Well, about a month ago, the bank failed, and papa came home looking so ill and miserable—that evening we knew the truth. It was the first regularly hot day of the season, and we were drinking tea in the large parlour, with the windows thrown wide open; I remember exactly how everything looked and was. The hawthorn on the lawn was in full bloom, and it filled the room with its scent, and the children had been to Coxe's Farm and brought home huge bunches of lilacs and laburnum, and horse-chestnut spikes. I was pouring out the tea, and mamma was reading the paper, and Susan was giving the little ones some marmalade

to keep them quiet, because she thought papa had a most dreadful headache, when all of a sudden mamma said, quite quietly, 'Mr. Kendrick, I hope you will not lose much by this unfortunate affair of the Radenham Bank; though I suppose we shall all suffer from it more or less. I have been looking into my desk, my dear, and I find I have one of their notes; you had better give me another—a Bank of England note, if you have one by you.'

"Then my father said, in *such* a tone, Milly, I hardly knew his voice; it made mamma look up in a minute; he said, 'I do lose a great deal by this mischance; and perhaps now I had better tell you what you *must* know in a few days at the furthest. The failure of the Radenham Bank is only *one* among many misfortunes. I am insolvent myself.'

"I felt that I was turning pale and cold, and mamma looked quite scared. Susan looked as if she were quite prepared for the bad news. Then mamma said, 'My dear Mr. Kendrick, what a thing to say! you really make me feel quite ill.'

"'I cannot help it, my dear Mary,' replied papa; 'but there is no use in keeping silence any longer; if I do not tell you the state of things, other people will. I never thought to see *my* wife and children come down in the world; but I suppose every dog has his day, and I have had mine; it's no use fretting.'

"'Did you say that you were *insolvent*?' asked mamma; and oh! Milly, with such a pale, blank face, that it went to my very heart. I know it

did to papa's, for his eyes filled with tears, though he tried to hide them. Mamma, you know, was thinking of the Wrightons—how their father failed, and how they had to live in a miserable cottage, and take in plain sewing, and how poor Tom, in his desperation, went away to sea, and was never heard of any more. And then papa came round to mamma and kissed her, and said, 'Don't be quite broken-hearted, Mary; many a better man has failed before me; and if my wife, that took me for better and for worse, and for richer and for poorer, will keep up her courage, and help me to bear my trouble like a man, and if my children will try to be cheerful and do their best, it will not be so very bad after all.'

"But, Milly, you know mamma never could see things on the brightest side, and she only cried and lamented, and said she supposed everything must be sold, and we should not have a roof to cover us. And that seemed to make papa very miserable, and I began to cry; I could not help it, seeing mamma set me on. But Susan looked quite brave and hopeful, and she said the first thing to be done was to bring down our minds to our circumstances, and the servants had better go, and we could all find out what sort of work we could do most easily, for of course we must all get our own living; and papa called her his good, brave little girl, and said she was like the pole-star on a cloudy night; and I felt ashamed of myself for crying, and made up my mind to bear *everything* courageously and patiently."

"But, Rose, is it really true that everything is to be sold? I know we must go to a smaller house; but all our furniture, all our pretty things, must we lose them—must they go to strangers? It is too hard, Rosy."

"Yes, they *must* all go; there is no question about it, Milly dear. You would not have your father accused of unfair dealing! Everything must be sold; and then, if anything remains after all the debts are paid, it will be ours, of course. Come, Milly, don't give way, let us all make up our minds to bear our misfortunes bravely and cheerily; who knows but that they may do us good in the long run? And I dare say papa's ill luck will not last for ever; perhaps we shall be richer than we ever were some day."

"When will the things be sold, Rosy? Will there be a sale?"

"Yes, to-morrow fortnight; the bills are out in the village and in Radenham already; to-morrow they will be put up on our own gate-posts; they would have been there before, only papa thought it would be so sad for you to see them, the very moment you saw the house."

"Dear, kind papa! For his sake I *will* try to be patient and cheerful." And my eyes were fast filling with long-repressed tears.

"Tea is ready," cried Susan, coming into the room, which was hers as well as Rosy's and mine. It was a large, cheerful chamber, containing three little snug white beds, three chests of drawers, a double-handed washing-stand, a capacious oaken ward-

robe, and a very pretty toilet-table. The windows, three in number, looked over the fields and over the downs, far, far away, till the horizon blended with the dim and distant sea-line. We each of us had our own particular window, with its low-cushioned chair and footstool, and its little round table for work or books, and many a pleasant summer afternoon had we spent in that familiar room, that had been the night nursery till Susan was twelve years old, and then my mother had sent away the twins to a smaller chamber, and furnished this one with all conveniences and many prettinesses for her three daughters. Rose and Susan had never been to a boarding-school; but they had been accustomed to go every day in the gig to Radenham, where there lived a lady who wished to educate three or four young girls with her own and only daughter; and under her tuition my sisters had learnt all that they knew—which, in point of actual book-knowledge and accomplishments, was not very much; but they had learned something, especially Susan, who had profited to the utmost by her advantages—something which I, at Agenoria House, had altogether failed to acquire—something which I sought for, but could not find—the way to be happy in this world.

Mrs. Cooper was a real Christian gentlewoman, and her daughter, sweet Annie Cooper, was one of the loveliest creatures I ever knew; she was Susan's especial friend. Rose could never bear the idea of leaving home, and, therefore, her joining me at Agenoria House was delayed from half-year to half-year;

but it had been settled, before I returned to school after the last Christmas vacation, that when I came home "for good" she should take my place for a year or two, and in her turn be succeeded by Susan in process of time. But now all these plans were no more: there was no more money to pay school-bills and school expenses; we could not even be sure that there would be time to study at all; and, worst of all, we had to leave our house, and the village, and go to live in some town, wherever my father could find employment. We hoped it might be Radenham, and not London; but a few days decided the question, and it *was* London, and *not* Radenham, that seemed almost as dear to us as our own pleasant village of Ferndown.

But I anticipate, and gladly would I pass over the incidents of the next few weeks. Putting the best face on it that we could, and cheering each other as best we might, we found it hard work, and a sore vexation, to lay down the old life as a thing that was ours no longer, and take up the new. And if we—my sisters, and my eldest brother, and myself—with all the elasticity of youthful spirits, with youthful hope and youthful energy, felt the bitterness of our reverse, what must it have been to our father and mother, who had reached, nay, rather passed, the middle stage of mortal existence! To go back to that first evening at home—it seemed both pain and pleasure to call it *home* still—Susan begged us to come down to tea; and she pretended to scold Rose for keeping me so long up-stairs, when

I must be both tired and hungry. We went down stairs accordingly; and the room with the tea-table, and the old familiar china, seemed so thoroughly to wear its wonted aspect, that I could not realize the fact of its being on the very eve of passing away from our sight for ever.

My father was sitting in his usual place when I entered the room. He rose and took me in his arms. "This is a sad coming home for you, my poor girl," he said, affectionately. "I thought I should be able to offer my children many advantages that I and your mother never possessed; but it is all over now; God has visited me with misfortune! Still, my child, remember that your father meant to do well by you—by all—but it was not to be."

Tea-time passed heavily away; we could not talk on indifferent subjects, and we dared not discuss our matters before my mother; for Rose had warned me that any attempt at conversation about our position and our prospects was sure to terminate in floods of hysterical weeping, that greatly distressed my father, and disturbed the serenity of the whole family. Oh! how different from "the coming home" I had anticipated; how unlike the scene I had again and again pictured to myself as transpiring on my return from school, as a young lady of finished education, ready to be introduced into society! Was I to be always stretching forth my hand to grasp the golden goblet that was never given to my keeping? *Was I to drink always of cisterns that failed*

me when I needed them most, or that steeped my lips in bitterness when I raised to them the sparkling draught, that *seemed* so pure, and sweet, and bright?

Yes, it was to be so for many a year;—and why? Because I was content with the cistern, instead of the fountain; because I knew not my rest and my true joy. An old divine once said—referring, I think, to that passage in Jeremiah, which says, “My people have been lost sheep, their shepherds have caused them to go astray, they have turned them away on the mountains; they have gone from mountain to hill; they have forgotten their resting-place”—that there were four ways in which persons in all ages were apt to go astray, *forgetting their resting place*. “First, when they sought in nature what was to be found only in grace; secondly, when they sought in themselves what was to be found only in Christ; thirdly, when they sought in the creature what was to be found only in the Creator; and, fourthly, when they sought that on earth which is only to be found in heaven.”

I never saw this passage written, but I heard it quoted one day, and it struck me so forcibly that I copied it into my note-book. The consideration of those words has been to me the unravelling of many a mystery, the dispelling of many a cloud. I write them down here—perhaps I shall write them again before I finish my story—that others may read them, and reading them, may haply learn the lesson they have been to me. At one or another

period of my life I have made the four mistakes that they enumerate; perhaps many of my readers have done so too—*are* doing so *now*. Let them ask themselves the momentous question—there can be no rest, no settled peace till it is satisfactorily answered.

But after tea, my mother went and locked herself up in her room, and we were free to talk as we chose. My father said he had only waited for my return to settle several matters; my brother had already made up his mind as to the path he would take; he was trying for a situation—college life could be his no longer—but what were we girls to do? It was very clear that we *ought* to do something for our own support; we were all healthy and strong, and of an age to exert ourselves; besides, it was a question whether my father's salary would be more than sufficient for himself and my mother and the little ones. There was some reason to believe that we could not, if we would, continue to be dependent on him; we all felt, I think, that the time was come for endurance and for action.

My father turned first to me:—"I think I need not be anxious about you, Milly; you have had the best of educations, and you have been a good girl, and improved your advantages to the utmost. I see no reason why you should not succeed as a governess. The life of a teacher is an arduous one, I know, and it involves much self-denial, and many trials; but it is respectable, nay, honourable, and I dare say it has its pleasures also, and it will afford you

a decent maintenance. What do you say, my dear?"

"I am ready to try," I answered; but my heart was faint within me. The Misses Johnson had once been governesses in private families, and at length, after years of toil and economy, had saved sufficient to begin an establishment of their own. They had succeeded, certainly—I knew they had some idea of retiring—but, then, the youngest of the two was nearly fifty years old; their best days were gone. There was nothing, to my mind, very alluring in the prospect of teaching for thirty or forty years, and then settling down on a competency at last. Settling down to what? To prim old-maidism, and dull tea-parties, and early hours, and cat and parrot worship! Such was my erroneous estimate of the capacities of spinsterhood; I know better now. I know that no woman, to whom God in his wisdom has denied the blessing of husband and children, *need* spend the evening of her days in useless monotony, or unblessed passivity. May not the sweetest earthly ties have been withheld in their case, that they might find in the world around them wider circles wherein to exercise their benevolence, and the womanly mercy and the feminine tact that God has given them?

But such a life I thought not of then; in fact, the bare idea of a life of routine was altogether distasteful to me—and yet, what else could I do? So I said I would be a governess, and try to do my best; but I resolved that I would escape from the

trammels of such a lot, at the very first opportunity. Rose and Susan could do as they liked; but I had set my heart on shining in a far different sphere, and I did not despair of being able to accomplish my desires. Rose thought she too could teach, if the children were very young, and she would try to improve and qualify herself for better situations. Susan was so young—not fifteen—that she could scarcely hope to find a remunerative occupation; but she had thought of a plan—she would go into some first-rate school, where her services on behalf of the little ones would be received instead of payment for her board and education. She knew it would be a hard life, perhaps a wretched one; but Susan did not shrink, she was the strongest of us all—I know why now.

We had talked till we were weary, when my eldest brother came in with a letter for my father; the post came in then of an evening at Ferndown.

“It is from my sister,” said my father, as he looked at the address and the post-mark; “from my sister, Mrs. Ryland.” When he had read the letter he gave it to me, saying, “That concerns you, Millicent.”

I read:—Mrs. Ryland was deeply grieved at her brother’s misfortunes; she could wish he had been more circumspect, &c., &c.; but she was quite ready to assist him by taking one of his daughters to live with her. She supposed that Millicent must be old enough to go into society, therefore she should prefer her to her younger sisters, for she had no patience with

girls that wanted a governess. If my father and mother agreed, I was to go to her in three weeks, in order to join her in an expedition to the sea-side, for she was about to spend several months at one of the most fashionable watering-places.

This was the pith of the letter, which did not impress me very favourably, for "my dear brother" at the beginning, and "your affectionate sister" at the end, were the only words that breathed the faintest tone of kindred affection. But, for all that, I had no sooner read Mrs. Ryland's letter than I was wild to go to her. That she would introduce me into society was evident, and that was exactly what I wanted; perhaps even she might make me her heiress, I thought to myself, for I was quite as near and nearer to her than the nephews and nieces of her deceased husband, the rich Sampson Ryland, Esq. It did not occur to me that I might be nearer to *her*, but they were certainly nearer to her *money*; for it was Ryland money, not Kendrick money, that enabled her to keep a complete staff of servants and a close carriage and pair.

And so the whole current of my thoughts was changed, and before bed-time it was decided that a letter should be written to my aunt on the following day, accepting her offer, and requesting her to name the day for my journey.

I lay down to rest in my own old bed in a perfect whirl of wonder, and regret, and hope, and feverish expectation. I fell asleep and dreamed that

I had succeeded to all the Ryland property, and was on the point of being betrothed to a peer of the realm. Ah me, silly Millicent Kendrick! And yet, recalling those dreams of my girlhood, I say to-day,—

“Ah, visions less beguiling far
Than waking dreams by daylight are.”

CHAPTER IV.

THE ROAD-SIDE INN.

Thus mortals, blind and weak below,
Pursue the phantom bliss in vain;
The world's a wilderness of woe,
And life's a pilgrimage of pain;—

Till mild *Religion* from above
Descends, a sweet engaging form,
The messenger of heavenly love,
The bow of promise 'mid the storm.

JAMES MONTGOMERY.

For a fortnight more I remained at Ferndown, and then, according to agreement, I went to join my aunt at her own residence at Lunechester, before proceeding to a fashionable watering-place on the north-eastern coast. A sadder fortnight I scarcely ever passed, and as the days sadly glided away and the end drew nearer and nearer, it became an actual pain to pass from room to room and gaze on old familiar possessions that were already, in point of law, ours no longer. Alas! alas! the cherished things that my mother had found in her new home when she entered it, a blooming radiant bride; the many luxuries that had from time to time been added; the countless trifles that were so pretty or so useful, or so teeming with dear and pleasant associations—all, all must be relinquished; and many were the mute farewells over the insensible wood, and plate, and china, that so soon would be at the

disposal of other owners. There were some paintings and a few books that it went to my heart to part with; and on the night before the sale, Rose lingered over the piano-forte, like one who holds converse for the last time with an object infinitely precious and beloved. My poor mother stood counting over the silver forks and spoons that she had been so proud of, and it was with a melancholy tenderness she dusted the best dinner-service, and arrayed it in order on the shelves of the china-pantry, where it figured as Lot 81.

Early on the morning of the sale, we all went away to lodgings at Radenham, whither such property as we could still honourably call our own was already conveyed. A sad day it was: my mother was so unwell that we persuaded her to go to bed; Harry was depressed because he feared that the situation he had expected would after all be lost; and Rose and I were very wretched, and cried at intervals all day. Susan was very pale, and perhaps less cheerful than I had ever seen her; but still she shamed us all, with her calm, brave, hopeful spirit, and she managed the twins Fred and Bertie—as we always called Herbert—better than any one.

I remained a very little while, not a whole week, with my own family; my aunt wrote to say that she was quite ready for her journey, and only waited for my arrival. Then, when the time was come, I felt that perhaps I had done foolishly; it never struck me, till the night before my departure, that I should in all probability never again call my

father's house my *home*. It was so different a packing-up from that I had been accustomed to at the close of the holidays: then I had taken what was necessary for the half-year and no more; now, everything that was mine was collected together to be taken to Lunecester. Then I could count the weeks that must elapse before it would be time to come home again; now there was no definite period fixed for my return; it was an understood thing that I was not going to visit Mrs. Ryland, but to live with her. I could not tell when I should see the beloved home faces once more, or *where* I should see them, or whether I should ever see them all together—my parents, Harry, my two sisters, and the twin boys—as we were that evening, an unbroken circle, for all the sorrow and loss that had fallen so heavily upon us.

Should I ever come back to Radenham again? I could not tell; for my father must pitch his tent where there was promise of pasture; and already there were hints of the probability of a residence in the metropolis. No, I felt sure I should *not* find them at Radenham—the dear old sober town—when ever I might find myself at liberty to join the household band once more. The evening passed heavily away; we were not inclined for much conversation, and from time to time we wondered how the old house looked now, with its bare walls and empty rooms, and the litter of straw on the lawn; and who had bought this, and who had the other; and my *mother hoped* the silver forks would go to some one

who would not neglect them; and Rose sighed, and said she would never care for another piano, not if it cost a hundred guineas.

When we were alone in our room, Rose and Susan cried, and wished I were going to stay with them; and, for the time, I wished too that I had not been so eager to seize the first opportunity of release from the troubles that had come upon us. Was it well to live in idleness and luxury while they were working for their daily bread, and compelled to forego all the little elegances, and many of the comforts, to which, of late years, they had been accustomed?

I brightened up, however, before we slept; I reminded my sisters how many advantages I should enjoy, and promised them great things when I should be married, and have a home of my own; and Rose was cheered, and Susan smiled, and we were in better spirits than we had been since the setting-in of the tide of misfortune.

It was a brilliant July morning when I awoke, and I was glad to think I should have sunshine on my long journey, that would take two days. I was soon dressed and ready for breakfast, and by nine o'clock I had said good-bye to all except my father and Harry, who went with me to the office where the coach started. It soon came up, rattling over the rough-paved street, and then I took my place in the inside, and I and my property were consigned to the special care of the guard, who was a Radenham man, and promised to take every care of me as far as the *coach went*.

I had to sleep one night at an inn, and this was a source of serious annoyance to my father and mother. I was indeed very young to travel so far and so long unattended. But I did not feel any apprehension myself; for I had all the energy, as well as all the presumption, of seventeen, and I rather liked the prospect of the long, untried journey, and the certainty of having to depend upon myself for my own safe-keeping and comfort.

At length the coach was ready to start; my father grasped my hand once more, and said, "God bless you, my child!" and the impatient horses responded to the coachman's tightening of the reins, and set off full pace down the quiet Radenham market-place.

I was alone inside the coach, and I could cry to my heart's content, and think with a tender regret of the dear faces, and the familiar scenes, that I might not see again for many a long day; and when at last I dried my eyes, and made up my mind that it would never do to begin by "giving way," I found, on looking from the coach windows, that we had already passed the boundaries of the Radenham neighbourhood, and were taking quite a different road from that which I had been accustomed to travel on my way to Hammersmith. The country was very pretty, and the corn was in many places almost ripe; the brooks ran rippling through the sunny meadows, and the hedge-rows were thick with summer flowers. I began to recover my spirits, and to look forward rather than backward; and this was quite natural, *for, in early youth, anticipation is always stronger*

than retrospection. I began to wonder what my life at Luncester would be like; how my Aunt Ryland would look, and, above all, what kind of people I should know and associate with in my new, untried home. The more I thought, the more content I felt: I had no doubt but that my aunt was the centre of a very delightful circle, and that I should enjoy, under her protection, all the pleasures and gaieties that I had vainly hoped to find in my own family at Ferndown.

The second time we stopped to change horses was at a very pretty road-side inn. Through the open windows, the parlours looked neat and cool; roses and clematis covered all the front of the house, and a long spray of a lovely noisette rose actually obscured the faded sign. All around were undulating meadow-grounds and shady woods; and not far off, standing by itself in a beautiful garden, was a long, low, grey house, that, from its isolation, and its proximity to the churchyard, I rightly judged to be the clergyman's residence.

While I was looking with interest on the tall box-edges, and the beds of lavender and scarlet lychnis, the door of the house opened, and an elderly gentleman in clerical costume, carrying a small valise in his hand, came rapidly down the broad gravel walk, and towards the place where the coach was standing.

"Any room inside?" he asked, as he came up to the inn-door; "Mrs. Clarenham made me promise not to ride outside again."

"Indeed, sir, and I don't wonder at it," said the landlady, curtsying respectfully; "two upssets is enough in anybody's life. Travelling's dangerous work, and what will be done when these new-fangled railroad things get all over the country, as they do say they will, I cannot tell. Ah!—as my poor mother used to say, sir—'there's only one way of coming into this world, but there's a thousand ways of going out of it.'"

"Yes, Mrs. Watkins," replied the clergyman, "but there is only the one way that God chooses for each person; and as we never can tell what that way is, or how or when it will be, it is necessary to live *always* in readiness for the hour that will witness our departure from this world to another."

"Ah, sir!" returned the landlady, shaking her head, "but we do forget these things too much! Really I get up on Monday morning, and find so many things to attend to, that all I have heard on the Sunday goes clean out of my head—indeed it do. But I can't help it, neither can my master; we're busy folks, you see, sir, and business must be attended to."

"And when you have attended to all the business you have in hand, suppose God should say to you, 'This night thy soul shall be required of thee.' Will you not then feel that you have neglected the *first* business of life—the *only* business that you will care to have transacted, when heart and flesh are failing, and the hand of death is upon you?"

He spoke gravely and solemnly, but very kindly,

without even a shade of sternness or of priestly arrogance; neither could any one fancy that he was speaking *professionally*, or merely in accordance with a sort of habit that some clergymen seem to think belongs to a black coat and white neckcloth. A farmer on the top of the coach, who had been listening to the conversation, now joined in. "Ah," said he, "what your reverence says is true enough. I live over there, beyond the hills, at Broadlands. Now, last week, there was our Duke, one of the richest men in all the country; he had his hunters, and his deer, and his game, and he went to court, and sat at the King's table, and everybody called him, as it was their *dooty* to do, 'Your grace!' Now, this week, his house, and his park, and his servants, and his money, belong to another man—that's his heir. He is stiff and cold, and all alone in one of his grand rooms, and in a day or two they'll carry him to the grave; and his fine funeral and a handsome coffin 'll be all the grandeur that he can have now, and that's nothing to him, I guess; his body's just dust and ashes, like any beggar's might be when the life was gone out of him, and his spirit's gone where they don't think nothing about such things as we fancy is grand and stately; and in a hundred years' time, if they dig up his bones, they'll never know whether they belonged to a duke or a street-sweeper. It's very true what the burial service says, and it must be true, for it's out of the Bible—the Bible, I reckon, counts before the Prayer-book—'we brought nothing into

this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out.' Ah, it's a different sort of riches we want then. I hope our poor Duke had some of that treasure that is laid up where moth and rust cannot corrupt, and where thieves do not break through and steal; that was our parson's text, a fortnight ago come next Sunday, and mighty fine he was."

There was no time for further conversation, for the coach was ready to start, and the clergyman, with a bow of cordial assent to what the farmer had said, stepped in and took his seat opposite to me. We were no sooner in motion again than he began to talk, not exactly on religious subjects, but in such a way that I could see that religion was really uppermost in his heart. Everything seemed referable and subservient to the "one thing needful;" and if he told me an anecdote of rustic life, or a legend of the olden times, there was an indefinable something all through the narration, which betrayed the speaker's innermost thought. It was something quite new to *me*. It was the key-note of a tune I had never heard, and could not sing; it was the music of a melodious, but unknown tongue. There is a song on earth, as well as in heaven, that none but the redeemed can learn.

I had an Italian book by my side, and my new acquaintance took it up, and seemed rather surprised to find that I could really appreciate the beauties of the sweet *Lingua Toscana*; and then we had a talk about foreign literature, and the great masters

in the world of art, and I enjoyed the conversation extremely, and hoped I should keep my clerical friend to the end of the long journey. But presently he rather hurt my silly, girlish vanity; he gave me to understand that he supposed I was going back to school after the vacation; and I did not like being taken for a school-girl, for I was dressed like a young lady, and I *felt* that my education was finished. Poor, senseless Millicent Kendrick! I can only say, in extenuation of my silliness, that I was at a foolish and self-important age—an age when one is too apt to lay claim to all the prerogatives and considerations due to womankind, while yet holding pertinaciously to the crude, unformed, shallow notions of mere girlhood. Well, one ought not to be hard upon the conceit and presumption of youth; everybody was seventeen *once*; and perhaps those who speak most slightly of the judgment and actions of the young, were the veriest simpletons in their own juvenile days. There is a common, vulgar saying, very trying to one's youthful sense of dignity—"Young folks *think* old folks are fools; but old folks *know* that young folks are fools." Very uncomplimentary, indeed, and slightly irritating to any but the most wisely regulated minds; but why are the "old folks" so sure of the foolishness of their juniors? Why, because they were the juniors once themselves; and they know now that they were but simpletons, in spite of their imagined wisdom. So let us bear and forbear, and not be too hard upon the beardless youth, *who takes upon himself to set us right, and*

can hardly conceal his contempt of our old-world notions; let him alone, and don't despise him in your heart; perhaps you *are* a little prejudiced; and *some* day or other he will look back on his twentieth birthday, and smile at his own impertinences, and call himself a puppy; and some one, two score years younger than himself, will laugh at him in his turn, and hold his opinion very cheap. And do not feel quite disgusted with the young lady there, who has done with the school-room, and is just "coming out" in her little circle, or her large circle, as the case may be. Have patience with her, as she sits there in her long sleeves, and long skirts, and crinoline, giving her opinions with an air of decision and superiority that *might* become her mamma. She, too, will be wiser before she is twenty; women come to their senses sooner than men; though whether, as a whole, they are ever as sagacious as the sterner sex is another question—a vexed question, too; and we will leave it alone, remarking, however, that there is authority for the woman learning in silence, with all subjection. Let us act upon the advice of the poet—

"Deal gently with the young, for they
Will have enough to bear;
Pass through this life as best they may,
They'll find it full of care."

There now, I have written quite a sermon to the elders; the young ones shall have it in their turn, when opportunity offers; and when I lecture them, I will try to remember that I was once Miss Millicent

Kendrick, aged seventeen. If I can only remember that, I shall not be severe, or starchy, or out of all patience with their little airs, and amusing self-delusions. I dare say all the young people who read this are wiser and better than I was "in my first youth;" for I here avow and confess, with contrition and shame-facedness, that I was very, *very* foolish; that with all my knowledge I lacked wisdom; and of "the beginning of wisdom—the fear of the Lord"—I knew nothing at all.

Well, I determined Mr. Clarenham should not think I was going to school again; so I told him plainly I was going to Luncechester to reside with my aunt, and that she went a great deal into society. He made some remark, I know not what now, that made me think he considered "society" in no very favourable light. I said pertly enough, "There's no harm in going into society if one attends to one's religious duties."

He smiled kindly, and replied, "Certainly not; you have stated the case exactly; but the question is, whether one *can* go frequently into 'society,' as you understand it, and at the same time give due attention to religious duties—you do not agree with me?"

"No, sir. I think life was made to be enjoyed; and we have no need to be gloomy and austere. I can go to parties and balls, and picnics, in the week, and yet attend church twice on the Sabbath; and of course no respectable person would think of omitting morning and evening devotions."

I said this with an air that I can scarcely recall now without blushing. What a self-opinionated little puss I was, with my seventeen years' experience!

"But, my dear child"—he spoke in such a fatherly tone *I could not* be annoyed—"going to church and *saying* prayers—no, nor even the reading the Bible daily—does not constitute religion—not the religion that will serve you, when that time comes that we were talking of at the inn yonder."

I looked my astonishment; and if my lips did not, I am sure my eyes asked the question, "What in the world, then, *does* constitute religion?"

He continued—"It is possible to say prayers morning and night, to read your Bible reverently, to peruse many devout books, to go to church three times on Sunday—nay, every day of the week, as regularly as the sun rises towards and declines from his meridian—you may be confirmed, and participate in all the ordinances of the Established Church; or you may be a Dissenter, and go to prayer-meetings morning, noon, and night; and yet have no *true* religion. In one word, you may do all this, and *not be saved*."

I looked incredulous, and I wondered what sort of sermons Mr. Clarenham preached, and I asked, very composedly, "How, then are we to be saved?"

I think he wished me to ask him this question; for his kind face lighted up, and he replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou *shalt be saved*."

"I do believe in him," I replied complacently; "all believe in him except heathens and Unitarians," I added, proud to show my theological knowledge.

"Pardon me, there are two kinds of belief: one is the mere result of education, and will avail you nothing—nay, it will but increase your condemnation; it will do you no good to believe that Christ can save the ungodly, unless you believe that he will save *you*—for you must be saved as an individual, not as a member of the Christian community. A few years ago an awful disease—the cholera—came into our land, and thousands were laid low by that desolating pestilence. Suppose some physician had discovered a medicine that would *certainly* cure the disease; and you were fain to believe in it because all who took it recovered their health. Well, such belief would be ineffectual if, when the malady came upon you, you either refused or neglected to take it yourself. What good would it do if you were to say, 'Yes, I know it cures people; I am sure it is a good medicine; but I don't like to take it, and I cannot tell whether it will cure *me*?'"

"No one would be so mad," I replied.

"In a case of cholera, I do not think any one would; in a case where the life or death of the body was involved, I believe no person would act so insanely; but where the *soul* is concerned, I have seen it, I have known it, a hundred times. My dear young lady, I have nearly reached the end of my journey, and we must part. Perhaps *we shall never meet again in this world—but, shall*

we meet in the world beyond the grave? If we do, it must be through the merits of our Lord Jesus Christ. May we find each other *there*, washed in the blood that cleanseth from all sin, and sanctified by the Eternal Spirit! Good-bye! may you be happy!"

The coach stopped on the outskirts of a large town; and Mr. Clarenham shook hands with me heartily, and gave me his card, and dismounted, and I saw him no more. How strange that he wished for me that which I was actually pursuing! I read what was written on the card—"The Rev. Percival Clarenham, Oxenbould Rectory."

Then I carefully put it away in my pocket-book, as a memento of our meeting; and the rest of the day passed wearily and slowly. We were in the midland counties, and the scenery was tame, and I was tired to death, as we irrationally say, when at length I reached the inn where I was to remain all night.

CHAPTER V.

THE CASTLE HOUSE.

Those dreary stairs, where with the sounding stress
Of ev'ry step so many echoes blended;
The mind, with dark misgivings, feared to guess
How many feet ascended.

For over all there hung a cloud of fear,
A sense of mystery the spirit daunted;
And said as plain as whisper in the ear—
The place is haunted.

HOOD.

My second day's journey was more uneventful than the first, for no one disturbed my solitude, and I had the inside of the coach to myself the whole day. I found, however, some amusement in noticing the features of the country through which we passed, for they were of a character hitherto unknown to me. There were large grimy towns and small dingy hamlets, with very little country between; and there were tall chimneys that looked as high as the Monument, smoking like so many volcanoes in incipient action; and immense buildings, with windows predominating over brick-work; and canals and bridges, and cranks and pulleys and shafts, and everything that indicated a busy mining and manufacturing district.

But by-and-by, as it grew late in the afternoon, and the shadows of the trees lay broad and deep upon the dusty road, we left all this work-a-day

region behind us, and entered upon a country, where there was nothing but rich pasture lands, and swelling corn-fields, and bright gleaming waters, and village churches nestling among tall trees; and even the canal, which held its course near the turnpike-road, was clear and smooth between the reedy banks; and the bridges were of picturesque grey stone, bright with the red stains and leaves of the "shining crane's bill," and with many-coloured lichens. On the horizon, too, were hills; and ever and anon, as we came to an open elevation, there floated past us the odour of salt sea-breezes. I knew, from various indications, that we could not be very far from Luncheon.

A little before seven o'clock we entered the town, and the coach stood before the gateway of an ancient inn, in the principal street, called Market-street. Not only the inn, but all the houses about it, had an old-world look; the windows were low and wide, and composed of little panes; and in some of them I saw relics of stained glass, and coats of arms; the door-posts were generally carved, and story after story projected till the garret floors seemed ready to topple over on to the pavement beneath. The town seemed to lie in a hole, for we came into it down hill; and looking up as I alighted from the coach, I saw high ground rising around in every direction, and, to the north and east, dark moors that seemed to shut us in from the rest of the world.

Mrs. Ryland's chariot was in waiting, and so was

her maid, an elderly woman, wondrous grim to look on. She came up to me as I stepped on the pavement, and requested to know whether I was Miss Kendrick. Of course I said "Yes;" whereupon Mrs. Susannah, in a voice that reminded me of thin vinegar well peppered, proceeded to inform me that she was deputed by my aunt to meet me at the coach office, and escort me to Castle House, my future residence.

I inquired after Mrs. Ryland's health, and was told that she was pretty well—*considering*. Considering *what*, I had no idea, for I believed she was of robust constitution, and her widowhood was of nine years' standing: I could not help thinking that perhaps it was "considering" all the whims and tempers of her Abigail, whose very severe countenance impressed me each moment more and more unfavourably.

In a short time my luggage was transferred to the green chariot, and I had, as the custom of those days was, "remembered the coachman." Then the well-kept greys began to move along, exactly at their own pace, which soon became necessarily very slow, for we were ascending a steep hilly street, the pitching and paving of which must have been contrived for the express annoyance of horses. At last, turning the corner of a huge old building, that looked strong enough to stand a six months' siege, we came suddenly on the Castle, a grand old pile of feudal days, still stately in its strength *and magnificence*, though now converted into a

county gaol. On one side of the Castle-yard was a broad green, with a double row of elms down one side of it, then a palisade fence, and then the street, or terrace, which went by the name of Castle Green.

Castle Green, however, consisted apparently of only four houses; but these were mansions—or, rather, they had been mansions, for, with the exception of one, they presented a rather forlorn and dilapidated appearance; that one, large, antiquated, and gloomy, was my aunt's house. I looked up at the many windows, high and narrow, and small-paned; at the imposing front door with its wonderful architrave; at the grey parapet on the roof, which took the shape of battlements; and my heart failed me, so chill, and dark, and dead, looked the home which was henceforth to be mine.

But there was little time to indulge in dreary presentiments; the carriage drew up, the front door flew open with a flourish, and a footman, whose modern aspect scarcely accorded with the old Plantagenet Castle, and the venerable air of the Castle Green, hastened to let down the steps of the carriage with a rapidity, a dash, and an air, quite worthy of the precincts of Belgravia.

The servants busied themselves with my luggage, and I slowly passed into the house. I found myself in a spacious hall, paved with black and white marble, and a ceiling all carved and groined like the roof of a church. In the sober evening light—the windows of coloured glass, all, but one towards

the north—it looked and felt a little like a *crypt*. Many doors opened into this wide, stately hall, but at the opposite side from the entrance rose a broad flight of oaken stairs, with heavy carved balustrades—all the oak about the house was nearly black with age. The stairs, however, were thickly covered with rich carpeting, and on the first landing was a beautiful stained window, evidently of very recent date. But I was led across the hall into an antechamber, and thence into a drawing-room, luxuriously furnished, where sat my aunt, Mrs. Ryland.

She rose as I entered, and there stood before me a tall majestic woman, whose faded beauty and haughty bearing were quite in keeping with the grand old mansion over which she presided. I accosted her with a beating heart, and then she drew me towards her, and saying, in peculiarly quiet tones, "My niece, Millicent," kissed me gravely on my forehead. Her manner was rather proud than cold; rather stately than reserved; she was, as the Honourable Mrs. Norton graphically says, "cordial, yet unfamiliar." One glance at Mrs. Ryland was quite sufficient to convince the most audacious person in existence that it would be quite impossible to take a liberty with her. And how unlike my father! Was this queenlike lady really his own and only sister—the Alice of past years, the companion and playmate of his boyish days?

I felt like one in a dream, as she kindly placed me in a softly-cushioned chair, and asked if I were *very much fatigued* after my long journey, and how

I had left my father and mother and the rest of the family. I simply answered her questions, for I felt an instinctive assurance that she had no desire, just then, to listen to circumstantial detail, and the less said about our family misfortunes the better she would be pleased. Presently Mrs. Susannah again made her appearance, and my aunt, with the air of an empress, desired her to "show Miss Kendrick to her apartment."

Mrs. Susannah led the way, and I followed up the broad staircase, and along more passages than I could count, to a room that seemed to me about a quarter of a mile from the drawing-room. And *what* a room! it was enough to tire a weak person to walk from the fireplace, at one end, to the ghostly-looking cabinet at the other. The bed was large and lofty, and the drapery was dark, heavy, and imposing; but it was lost in the midst of that wide, aerie-looking room; it was like an island in a vast lake, like an oasis in a boundless desert. If it had only been winter, that I might have had a fire to exorcise the gloom and the awful stillness—if only there had been *gas* at the Castle House! One cannot imagine ghosts and gas in connection with each other.

But there was neither fire nor gas, only the fading summer twilight: I wondered what kind of a light I should be allowed at bed-time; half a dozen mould candles would not do much more than render darkness visible. I felt hundreds and hundreds of miles *away from Radenham*; it seemed years upon years

since I slept with my sisters in our comfortable, cozy bed-room at Ferndown. The old life seemed separated from the new, by an immeasurable distance. I had commenced, as it were, a totally fresh phase of existence. Would it be a happy one?

It might be. I was evidently in the abode of wealth, and a certain kind of luxury; and things would be different when I began to feel myself at home, and to know the good people who were on my aunt's visiting list; but then, *could* I ever feel at home in that wide, dark, silent house?

I was roused from these cogitations by Mrs. Susannah, who, seeing the state of abstraction in which I sat, grimly came forward to assist me in unrobing. I hastily rose, and began to unfasten my cloak myself. I could not hear her thin, skeleton fingers about my throat; and in a few minutes I was again ready to descend.

The drawing-room looked a little more life-like, when I entered it the second time; for tea was on the table, and there was an appetizing odour of ham and broiled fowl pervading the spacious apartment. I had time now thoroughly to examine Mrs. Ryland. She was very tall; her hair, though streaked with grey, was still dark and abundant; it had once been raven black, and marvellously profuse; her features were stern, but regular, even perfect; her eyes were large and dark, and their expression was at once proud and sad; her complexion was clear though colourless. Added to this, she had hands of perfect *beauty*; *I have never seen such since, except in some*

exquisite masterpiece of sculpture; and her feet were small and slender. I never think of my Aunt Ryland, as she stood before me that night in her soft robes of thick, lustrous black satin, and a square of priceless black lace tied over her head instead of a cap, without associating her with one of Tennyson's glorious verse-pictures, in his "Dream of Fair Women:"—

"At length I saw a lady within call,
Stilller than chisell'd marble standing there;
A daughter of the gods, divinely tall,
And most divinely fair.

Her loveliness with shame and with surprise
Froze my swift speech: she, turning on my face
The star-like sorrows of immortal eyes,
Spoke slowly in her place."

I know the poet dreamed only, in these lines, of Helen of Troy, the faithless, beautiful Queen of Sparta; but, in reading them again and again, I cannot help connecting them with the image of that stately woman I called my aunt. Unhappy Helen! scarcely less unhappy Alice Ryland! But on one side of the room was the portrait of what she had been when she was Alice Kendrick: the perfect features were the same; the figure in its queenly height and grace was the same; but the eyes, though proud, were shy, and full of a happy light, and the cheeks were rounded to a beauteous curve, and they rivalled the pure pink glow we sometimes see inside foreign shells. I had heard my father say his sister Alice was the finest girl he had ever seen; and his *general account* of her was, that she was "as beau-

tiful as summer-roses, and as proud as Lucifer." That she had a *history*, I knew; but of what nature I had no idea; my father had never talked to us about his sister: all we could gather from casual remarks was the fact that she was very wealthy, very handsome, and, in some way, unhappily married. Even my mother knew no more; and, indeed, I am not sure that my father himself was much better informed; for many years there had been but little intercourse between the brother and sister, whose dispositions were as uncongenial as their persons were dissimilar; my father had auburn hair, a ruddy complexion, and grey, humorous-looking eyes; and, for a man, his stature was not above the middle height. How strangely different, sometimes, are the children of one father and mother!

However, this evening, Mrs. Ryland seemed inclined to make up for lost time. She now questioned me very closely respecting the state of our affairs, and the appearance and characters of my sisters and brothers; and I underwent quite a cross-examination on educational matters. It was a long time before it occurred to her that I must be tired and ready for bed.

"It seems a very large house, aunt," I said, when, at last, she had rung the bell for chamber candles.

"Yes," she replied, gravely, "I suppose it is immense, scarcely smaller than the Castle; but I have never been all over it."

"Never been all over it, Aunt Ryland!" I could *scarcely* believe the testimony of my own ears.

The idea of living in one house, however roomy, for so many years without going all over it!

"My dear Millicent, you should not repeat my words: it is ill-bred; did your governess never tell you so? No; I meant what I said, I have never been all over the house. It is far larger even than it seems; what appears like next door, is really a part of this house. There was a separation made rather more than a hundred years ago; but in the time of the late Mr. Ryland's father the communication was restored. I know not why, for the rooms in that quarter have never been used, that I am aware of; then there is the south wing, running out to the very brow of the hill, and communicating with the Priory Chapel, which is now in a state of ruin, and closed up. I would advise you never to go in that direction."

I could not help asking *why*.

"It is said to be haunted," was the exciting reply. "I do not of course mean to say that there are actual ghosts in the south wing; but the gallery and the rooms are in such a state of dilapidation, and the associations of the place are so gloomy, that it is better left to the rats that overrun it, and are, doubtless, the authors of certain noises, that from time to time scare my servants out of their senses."

"Did anything happen there?" I asked, timidly.

"Yes, there was great wickedness committed there. This house has only belonged to the Ryland family for the last century; in old times it used to

be called 'The Castle House,' and, indeed, is so still, in some instances; and there used to be a subterranean passage, leading from the south wing into the Castle itself; this, of course, is blocked up at both ends, and where the entrance on our side is, I really am not certain. Well, this old mansion, which for a long time was the Dower House of the noble family of Lunechester, passed at last into the female line. There was a certain Lady Alice married to the brave Baron of Hilbree, and the earl, her father, unwilling to lose the society of his only daughter, gave her the Castle House as a part of her marriage portion, and she and her husband were to spend some months of every year within its ancient walls. The Lady Alice was a spoilt child, and she possessed extraordinary beauty and great talent. All went on well for several years, and a fair son was born to the brave Baron of Hilbree; then came trouble—there was war in Germany, and the Baron took leave of his lady, and rode away down the Castle Hill at the head of his retainers, to go and fight in the cause of the Prince Palatine, the husband of the gentle and unfortunate Elizabeth Stuart. In his absence came the wicked Lord of Arnsyde, from his stronghold on the estuary of the Ken, and he poured his honied flatteries into the too-willing ear of the beautiful Lady Alice; and she forgot her wifely truth, and sinned against God and against her husband."

"How could she?" I interrupted, warmly.

Mrs. Ryland did not notice the interruption, and

she went on—"In process of time, the Baron of Hilbree came back again, and clasped in his arms his child and his traitorous wife; and she pretended to rejoice at his return, and when she wept, she said it was with gladness at her dear lord's safe restoration to his own home. But all the while she was plotting treachery; she knew of a subtle poison—it was a day of poisons, you know—that gradually took away life. Very soon the baron's health began to decline; he grew fretful and feverish, and people shook their heads, and said he was in a galloping consumption; and one day, when his faithful esquire went to seek him, he found him lying dead in the room that had been his bridal chamber. The bed is there now, with its mouldering hangings, and its tattered embroidered coverlet; and the black carved cabinet, in which Alice kept the deadly poison, is there too; but no one ever goes near the place."

"And what became of the wicked woman?" I asked. "Was her crime discovered?"

"She lived a long life of the most terrible remorse, and she practised the severest penances. She lived shut up in the very rooms that had been the scene of her guilt, and she slept nightly on the very same bed where her murdered husband had breathed his last. At length she poisoned herself, and her attendants found her in the identical spot where, nearly thirty years before, the baron's old servant had made the sad discovery of his master's death. She left behind her a written confession of her *crime*; but things were hushed up, that the honour

of a noble, nay, a royally-descended house might not be tarnished in the eyes of the world. Her son had grown up a sad and moody man; he never married, and when he died the Castle House passed to a distant branch of the family, and the south wing was deserted, and the Priory Chapel suffered to fall into decay. Other troubles came upon the devoted house; and, in process of time, it was first mortgaged, and then sold, to the grandfather of my late husband, who chose to inhabit it himself, and lived here, I believe, in great state; the most hospitable old gentleman for many miles round. And so it has come down to the present generation, and the south wing is closed to this day, and, as the servants say, haunted."

Soon afterwards, I took my candle, and bidding my aunt good night, crossed the gloomy hall, ascended the broad staircase, and made the best of my way to my room. I contrived, however, to take the wrong turning, and presently I found myself in a long, arched passage, that looked ghostly enough. On the present occasion it was haunted by a large *mangle*. I knew then I was quite wrong; I had seen no mangle on my first visit to my chamber. I stood still, thinking what I had better do, when a door opened, and a very pretty neat housemaid came out. To her I explained my difficulty, and she respectfully guided me back, showing me one or two landmarks that I might not wander again. Not far from my own room, I noticed a small, ponderous door, *clenched with iron nails*, and set deep in the

wall. "Where does that lead to, Mary?" I inquired.

"To the south wing, ma'am," replied Mary, solemnly, "to the haunted rooms; we always keep that door shut fast; the mistress keeps the key herself."

"So it seems, then, that ghosts are amenable to iron bolts and oaken planks," I said, laughing.

"I don't know, ma'am," replied the girl, with a puzzled air, "but there really is a ghost—leastways, a *ghostess*—in them rooms. And I hope it will stop there."

"I think it will, Mary; but did you ever see it?"

"No, ma'am, but cook that went away, because she would get to the decanters, *did* see it."

I had reached my own room now, and I bade Mary good night, and set down my candle on a table in the middle of the room; the light was lost in gloomy space, and the corners were in darkness. I did not like it, for I was not of a romantic turn; if only Rose had had the luck to sleep in such a room, she would have gone wild with delight; for she was always wishing to live in a castle, where there were echoing corridors, and winding stairs, and mysterious doors, and tapestry, and haunted rooms. My tastes were quite of another description. I preferred a modern house, cheerful and well-lighted—the sort of house that ghosts would instinctively shun; and here I was, next door but one to the dreaded south wing.

Albeit, I was rather nervous, and inclined to be

foolish. I soon fell asleep, and dreamed that my aunt was the wicked Lady Alice. When I awoke, the morning sun was streaming brightly into the room, and I felt vastly cheered, for there is nothing like brilliant sunshine for chasing away a vague dread of the supernatural. I fell asleep again, and slumbered till nearly breakfast-time.

CHAPTER VI.

THE SEA AND THE SHORE.

Yet more! the billows and the depths have MORE:
High hearts and brave are gathered to thy breast:
They hear not now the booming waters' roar,
The battle thunders will not break their rest:
Keep thy red gold and gems, thou stormy grave!
Give back the true and brave!

MRS. HEMANS.

I HAD not much leisure to explore the mysteries of the Castle House, for, in less than a week after my arrival there, I was again on my travels: my aunt, and Mrs. Susannah, and myself were on the way to Scarby.

Still, ere I left Lunechester, I had learned the principal thoroughfares in the town by heart; I had seen the parish church just below the Castle, with its ancient tower and green slate roof, and its burying-ground sloping down to the river's brink; I had listened to two sermons by the Rev. John Broadway; and, above all, I could find my way through all the *inhabited* part of the Castle House.

In the dining-room were several portraits, among them one of the late master of the mansion, my aunt's deceased husband. I had fancied him a stern and gloomy man—a man one might perforce respect and esteem; but a man to be feared and held in *reverence*. To my surprise, I looked upon the

likeness of a gentleman, not exceeding thirty years of age; very fair and slender, having curls of light hair, and mild blue eyes, and an expression of great sweetness and goodness, blended with melancholy. In the grave wistful tenderness of the fair, almost boyish face; in the quiet sad gaze of the beautiful eyes, I saw something infinitely loveable; and I saw, too, that *happiness* had never been his portion. I looked again and again at the portrait, wondering why he and his wife had not found satisfaction in their married life, and how it was that persons of so evidently dissimilar a temperament had ever wished or cared to unite their fate. There was another portrait, too, not an oil-painting, but a drawing in coloured chalks; and it was in my aunt's dressing-room, whither she called me on the very morning of our departure for Scarby. It was the portrait of a child of extreme loveliness; and the gentle blue eyes, and the flaxen curls, and the half-sad and wistful lines round the tiny mouth, disclosed at a glance her parentage—at the first look I knew that she must be Mr. Ryland's daughter. I remembered, too, hearing that my aunt had one little girl in the first year of her marriage, and that she died while yet very young. How hard it must have been to lose that lovely little blossom, her only child!

Mrs. Susannah was in the room, fastening the straps of her mistress's imperial, and when she saw me standing before the beautiful picture she seemed *both annoyed and irritated*, wherefore I could not

imagine. But when, a little while afterwards, I went back to my own chamber, she followed me, and said in her sharp, vinegary tones, that always set my teeth on edge, "Miss Kendrick, whenever you may happen to be in my lady's room, you must never look at that portrait, nor take any notice of it, or ask any questions about it, or do anything to draw my lady's attention to it. Please to remember."

This was intolerable. To be tutored by a waiting woman, as if I were a little girl in the nursery; and to be spoken to in those shrill, thin tones, and in so dictatorial a style—it was not to be endured. I drew myself up, and looked my surprise. I saw that she meant impertinence, and I thought it best to show my displeasure by a dignified silence. She seemed to care little, however, whether I received or resented her insolence, for, after giving me a glance of unmistakeable contempt and dislike, she marched out of my room, after a fashion that she imagined to be an exact imitation of her mistress's gait and carriage; and, as she crossed the threshold, I said, "Be good enough, next time you wish to come into this room, to knock at the door before you enter."

She gave me a look of the blackest malice, and turned away. I saw that she regarded me in the light of a rival, an intruder, an interloper, who would probably be more to her mistress than she had ever been, and I was certain that she hated *me in the depths* of her heart, and would do any-

thing she dared to injure me. And then the question arose, *how far would she dare?* I was not a coward, but I felt very uncomfortable as I reflected on Mrs. Susannah's undisguised malignity and her evident cunning: I had far more to dread from her than from the ghosts of the south wing. If an evil spirit walked the house, it was indubitably *hers*; and when, one evening, she had occasion to go to a distant and long-disused room, and the servants advised her to make haste before the twilight came on, I thought her answer perfectly true; for, with her usual glum look, she remarked, "that she supposed she shouldn't see anything worse than herself." I really thought she would not!

My spirits rose as we left Lunecchester behind us, and I enjoyed the journey very much; there was, however, a very considerable alloy in the presence of the objectionable Susannah, who rode in the carriage with us, pretending to read one of Blair's sermons, but watching me with a pertinacity that made me shiver, although the thermometer was up to 90 degrees in the shade. I felt as if she were some desperate Grimalkin, and I a hapless, defenceless mouse; and I thought of all I had ever heard about "the evil eye," till I grew more nervous than I had been since my first night at the Castle House.

As we passed along, through a beautiful and diversified country, my aunt pointed out everything worthy of remark; and, in the course of conversation, *I discovered that she read both French and*

Italian, and was an accomplished German scholar. She was evidently well pleased to find me capable of conversing with her on subjects which she evidently preferred, and we carried on for some time an animated discourse in French, to the excessive annoyance of Mrs. Susannah, who felt that here, at least, I had the advantage of her. I am sure she set down in her own mind this unintelligible conversation, involuntary on my part, as another deadly offence.

We reached Scarby in perfect safety, and, for the first time, I saw the sea in all its glory. It may seem strange that, living, as I did, within view of the sea-line, I had never been quite close to it; but one thing or another always prevented the long-anticipated event, and in those days it was not the custom to take as many journeys as we do now. There were fewer inducements to travel, for railroads were in their infancy, and watering-places on the coast were, as yet, few and far between.

Never shall I forget my delight on the first morning of our stay at Scarby. Scarby was then a very fashionable place, the beloved resort of *litterati* and aristocrats, and *millionnaires*, and, of course, the haunt of tuft-hunters, fortune-hunters, infirm rakes, and adventurers of every description. Our lodgings were the most commodious and the most expensive in all the town; they were replete with luxuries not often found in private dwellings, and they commanded extensive views of the sea

itself, and the line of coast to the north, and the fir-crowned hills in the distance.

I rose early on that first morning, and finding neither my aunt nor her Abigail visible, I thought I would stroll down to the shore and watch the rising of the tide. I did so, and I remember to this hour my first impressions of the "ever-sounding sea." How grandly swelled that chorus of the great waves—that "billowy anthem"—pouring its floods of harmony under that wide blue dome of sky—the cathedral of the world!

What was the sea saying? what were the words of its proud, measured chant? I could not tell; but the glorious chords of that grand wave-music thrilled my heart, and a strange longing filled my soul—the passionate desire of the human spirit for communion with the Infinite! And as I stood on the pebbly beach, ever retreating before those proud billows, I remembered two verses of the Bible. I had heard them so often in church that I could not help knowing them by heart; they were these:—"The floods are risen, O Lord, the floods have lift up their voice; the floods lift up their waves. The waves of the sea are mighty and rage horribly; but yet the Lord, who dwelleth on high, is mightier."

I remembered, too, another passage I had learned at school—"Fear ye not me? saith the Lord; will ye not tremble at my presence, which have placed the sand for the bound of the sea, by a perpetual decree, *that it cannot pass it*; and though the waves

thereof toss themselves, yet can they not prevail ; though they roar, yet can they not pass over it?"

"Yes," I thought to myself, "if this sea be so great and so glorious, how much greater and more glorious must be the God who created it, and who holds its waves in the hollow of his hand!" I really think I was nearer being happy that morning than I had ever been before, but yet the source was insufficient. I had indeed ascended from Nature to Nature's God; but it was to a god of my own creation, and a god who would have done exceedingly well for the heathen poets of antiquity; not the God of the Bible—not the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ; and I could not look round upon that glittering sea, those wild, scarred cliffs, that smooth, shell-strewn sand, that azure arch of cloudless sky, that glorious orb lighting up sea, and air, and shore with his resplendent beams, and—

"Lift to heaven an unpretentious eye,
And say, '*My Father* made them all.'"

I returned home with an excellent appetite for breakfast, and as Mrs. Susannah was not present, I felt quite at my ease, and gave my aunt a long account of my early ramble on the shore. She listened with her usual half-grave, half-melancholy air, but she seemed pleased to find that I could appreciate natural beauty, and—a rarer gift—convey to others my own impressions of the scene.

After a time, however, she began to speak of other things; she said she must go to the library and put *our names* down there, and run over the "Visitors'

Book," and see who had already arrived at Scarby; though, as it was still early in the season, we could not hope to find many of her own circle. And we did go to the library and inscribe our names—"Mrs. Ryland and Miss Kendrick, Castle House, Lunechester." And we made choice of half-a-dozen novels, and Mrs. Ryland recognized some old acquaintances, and very soon we were in full flow of conversation, interchanging news, and scandal, and gossip, with a glibness and rapidity peculiar to fashionable watering-places.

And now began a round of gaieties—picnics, water-parties, yachting, concerts, impromptu balls, bathing, dressing, dancing, and novel-reading. The loftier and purer emotions of that first morning on the solitary shore came no more, or with greatly-diminished strength; they were like the foam on the crest of the curling wave, now sparkling for a moment in the golden sunshine, now scattered and engulfed in the briny deeps below. Was I happy? No; there was always a "*but*," a qualification to every joy, an alloy in every pleasure; and, independent of minor disappointments, and the restless, unsatisfied aching that ever and anon rose up within my heart, and would not be repressed, there was always the grim alien, Mrs. Susannah, the Mordecai at my gates. .

And I made another discovery—the Abigail herself was very far from happy; "envy, hatred, and all uncharitableness," did not seem productive of much content; she looked sometimes the very pic-

ture of baffled enmity and unmitigated woe. Neither was the Abigail's mistress happy; oh, no! I soon found that out; I soon perceived that my aunt derived not the slightest satisfaction from the gaieties and the frivolities in which she so largely participated. At times she seemed roused from her wonted passive sadness, and almost at home in the gay circle in which she moved; and then she became brilliant, and her wonderful powers of conversation were developed to the admiration of all, and to the profound astonishment of many who knew her only as the proud, reserved, and almost taciturn Mrs. Ryland. When she chose thus to exert herself, she possessed a wonderful power of fascination; her still beautiful face lost its cold, quiet, impenetrable expression; her dark eyes lighted up with a radiance and splendour that I have never observed in any other person; and, like a transient glow of red sunlight on fading woodlands at the close of a day of storm and gloom, came the bright flush to her pale, thin cheek.

But these moments of unbending were few and far between, and they were evanescent as the glories of sunset clouds; and when the brief, feverish excitement had subsided, it left her colder, sadder, and more silent than before. But she was willing that I should please myself with other society than hers; and very soon I had quite a number of friends and acquaintances, with whom I spent much of my time, while my aunt remained in the house, *occupied with an interminable piece of embroidery,*

or sat with her book and her parasol in some sheltered spot on the beach, seldom turning a page, and looking listlessly and drearily over the wide waste of moaning waters. No, she was not happy—her riches could not confer happiness: sometimes I thought—and the thought grew, and was strengthened from day to day—that she was intensely miserable.

And for myself—after the first week of gaiety I grew exceedingly tired of sea-side dissipation; I actually found myself rising late, in order to make the long day shorter; and I was wearied to death with ringing the changes on bathing, dressing, promenading, reading third-rate novels, and chattering all kinds of silliness. Before the end of August I had made up my mind that a life of indolent pleasure-seeking and empty frivolities would never make me happy. Again I was foiled; I must search farther, and in a different direction.

We lingered at Scarby till quite the end of September, and beautiful weather we had; but towards the close of the month the equinoctial gales set in, and swept the shore with unexampled fury. One Saturday afternoon in particular—I shall never forget it—we were driven in, my young companions and I, by a sudden storm of wind and rain that seemed to come from the cold, cheerless north-east. We were glad to find ourselves under cover, and to see a bright fire blazing in the long-disused grate, for the evening promised to be wet and tempestuous.

As the weather did not improve, my friends went

home to their own lodgings, all close at hand, for there seemed every prospect of a terrific hurricane and a deluge of rain. My aunt sat by the fire, sad and silent, more gloomy, I thought, than ever; and I took my novel, and seated myself close to the window, where I could watch the gathering of the storm. It was with a mingled interest and dread that I gazed on the livid clouds slowly rising from the sea—such clouds as I had never seen before, leaden-coloured, and pale yellow, with here and there strange wild rifts, with coppery edges, and

“Ragged rims of thunder brooding low,
With shadow-streaks of rain.”

Slowly, slowly came the threatening clouds. The waves beneath were black with a Stygian blackness, each one crested with a wreath of boiling, snowy foam—like the manes of wild white horses, as one of our poets describes it;—and along the shore, on the cliffs and caves, and on the fire-belted hills, there was a strange, unearthly light, as if all Nature had suddenly changed her vivid tints for Indian ink and pale sepia.

“There is an awful storm coming,” I said to my aunt, who scarcely seemed to notice the increasing gloom; our drawing-room was so dark—and it was only a little past five—that I was obliged to close my book from sheer inability to see the clear, bold-typed lines.

She rose when I spoke, and came to the window. “Yes,” she said, “there is every sign of tempest;

and I heard one of the fishermen say at noon, that the boats would not be able to go out with the evening tide, and—hark! I hear the thunder!”

I listened; but I could not tell whether it was the deep booming of the angry sea, or the hollow sound of the wind, or the actual thunder itself; but presently there came a flash, and then an undeniable peal, and, at the same moment, the mighty blast swept in with tenfold force and fury, and the great waves tossed themselves like living things, lashed to maddest rage, on the black jagged rocks of the coast. The uproar was terrific: faster and louder came the heavy-rolling thunder; higher foamed the inky waters with a roar that seemed to shake the solid earth; and the sound of that mighty wind was like nothing I had ever heard before, and like nothing I have heard since. And ever and anon came pale flashes from the rifts of spectral-like cloud, that now, torn in a hundred pieces, had assumed the wildest and most fantastic shapes.

From one of these wild rifts there shone forth a line of lurid ghastly light, and in its pale beam stood Mrs. Ryland, her dark hair and eyes, and her white, marble-like face, wearing, as it seemed to me, an almost unearthly expression. I shuddered, and felt quite frightened under that awful sky, and that stormy, inexpressibly-dreary gaze.

We watched till it grew quite dark, and then the curtains were drawn, and the candles lighted, and Mrs. Ryland went back to the fire, and sat down, more silent and gloomy than before. All the evening

she sat there, quite still, rarely speaking, her eyes wandering out into the darkness through a little side-window, where there was no blind, and her white hands solemnly clasped on her black dress. I thought, as I looked at her—so might the unhappy Lady Alice have looked, sitting, for stern penance; in the scene of her crimes.

Once I found my way into the kitchen, and there were gathered the landlady and her maids, and some neighbours; and they were telling tales of former tempests, when houses had been blown down, and stacks of chimneys swept away, and ships cast upon the rocky shore; and every now and then the maids ejaculated, "Poor souls at sea!" It is strange how terror and danger level all distinctions of rank. I, who had never spent three consecutive minutes in the kitchen before, was now glad to accept our landlady's invitation to sit down there, and form one of a frightened, anxious, excited group. More than once we heard the crash of tiles and the fall of masonry; and when the door was opened, the blast rushed in like a giant that would not be defied; and we thought it would be torn from its hinges before the servants could succeed in closing it again. I went back upstairs at last, taking for my consolation the landlady's assurance that the house would never stand till morning.

It did stand, however; and towards midnight the rain ceased and the wind fell; but no one in Scarby slept very soundly, I fancy. Sunday morning rose wild and lowering; but when breakfast was over I

prevailed upon my aunt to let me go to church, assuring her that I could battle with the wind, which, though still strong enough to be inconvenient, was as nothing compared with the fury of the preceding evening. Rather reluctantly my aunt gave permission, and I went, sallying forth alone. It did not rain as I pursued my way to the church; but the agitation of the sea seemed more tremendous than ever—the waves were running “mountain-high.” I reached my destination without let or hindrance, and the wind was to my back; but during the service I thought the tempest once more gathered strength, and at last I was sure that the storm was wilder than ever, for the clergyman’s voice was drowned in the wild uproar of wind and wave.

And just as the brief inaudible sermon was being hastily concluded, I saw many people leaving the church; and the clergyman himself pronounced the blessing with extreme rapidity, and ran down the pulpit-stairs with most unclerical speed. The congregation quickly dispersed, and I soon found myself in the porch. It rained, and I put up my umbrella, and, grasping the handle with one hand and the edge with the other, I tried to make my way down the little hill to the shore. In a moment my umbrella was turned inside out, and torn to ribbons, my dress was thrown over my bonnet, and, if I had had a large crinoline on, I believe I should have been carried away bodily into the bay.

When I came down on the shore, I found all the population of *Scarby* assembled. Not fifty yards

from the land was a small vessel tossing wildly on the rocks, and the crew were making signals for assistance; we even thought we could hear them shout and call for aid; but Scarby then had no life-boat, and it is a question whether even a life-boat could have lived for a minute in such a sea. Close at hand was a cottage, where we kept our bathing-dresses; and I rushed in, and, throwing off my bonnet, begged from the good woman of the house the loan of a large coarse shawl; and, wrapping myself in its thick folds, I hurried down to the beach. Just as I reached the principal group, the vessel heaved tremendously, and then down she went, with all her crew, into the black, boiling waters! Once more she rose; and, as she did so, a cry of grief—a wail—ran along the shore; for five men were still clinging to the rigging and to the sides of the ship. For more than a minute the unfortunate vessel hung poising on the crest of a mighty wave; then slowly—slowly—she sank down, and was seen no more. In about a quarter of an hour, the tide having turned, pieces of the wreck were washed up at our feet; but the once living freight slept on in the bosom of the deep; there to rest till, on the morning of the resurrection, the sea shall give up her dead.

Awed and trembling, thinking of the corpses beneath the wave, and the souls swept into eternity, I turned me to go home.

CHAPTER VII.

THE SOUTH WING.

No other sound or stir of life was there,
Except my steps in solitary chamber,
From flight to flight, from humid stair to stair,
From chamber into chamber.

Deserted rooms of luxury and state,
That old magnificence had richly furnished
With pictures, cabinets of ancient date,
And carvings, gilt and burnished.

Prophetic hints that filled the soul with dread,
But through one gloomy entrance pointing mostly,
The while some secret inspiration said,
That chamber is the Ghostly! Hood.

SADDENED and depressed, I reached our lodgings; and all that day, and the following night, my heart was very heavy. The thought of *death* weighed painfully upon me; it haunted me continually, and I could not emerge from the train of reflection, which the mournful spectacle of the sinking ship, and the drowning mariners, had suggested. Death—death; strange and awful mystery, the severance of body and soul; how inexpressibly terrible it appeared to my shrinking spirit!

At that time, death was to me the sad end of life, the close of happiness, the expiration of every hope and every joy, the entrance to the gloomy grave. Like a dark shadow, it fell on the bright *pathway of mortal existence*; like an icy wind, it

swept over the sunny warmth of my earthly day. And, with all my being, I shrank back appalled and apprehensive; for I feared, I dreaded to die.

Then, I thought of Death as the King of Terrors; and grim and spectral was his ghastly form, to my imagination. Little did I think that a time would come when I should think of him as a lovely, solemn angel; as "Death, the *consoler*," who, "laying his hand on many a heart, had healed it for ever"—a time when *rest* should seem all that was left to wish for—a time when I should read the touching Acadian tale of the American poet, and linger over the lines which said:—

"All was ended now, the hope, and the fear, and the sorrow;
All the aching of heart, the restless, unsatisfied longing;
All the dull, deep pain, and constant anguish of patience;"

and long, with heart-broken sadness, for such an ending, and such a repose from the storms and cares of mortal life. And such a time did come: the shadow of death was upon me; the treasures of my heart were reft away, and I refused to be comforted.

But, thank God, when that time came, I arose from the ashes in which I had lain so long, and cried, "God is the strength of my heart, and my portion for ever." "The sting of death is sin; but thanks be to God, who giveth us the victory, through our Lord Jesus Christ." "For to me, to live is Christ, but to die is gain."

And now I wait, in hope and in thanksgiving,

looking for the first token of the Master's summons—

“For it may be, I’m nearer home,
Nearer *now* than I think.”

But to return to that miserable Sunday at Scarby. A weight of gloom was on my soul, that only change of scene could dispel: I never looked at the sparkling sea, flecked with foam and sunshine—for the fair weather soon returned—without thinking of the depths beneath, where the dead were lying; and it was with unmingled joy that I saw Mrs. Susannah making preparations for our departure; and a sense of relief came upon me, as I saw for the last time the rocky headlands of the bay.

On a quiet, golden autumnal day we re-entered Lunechester; the hills looked grey and calm, the old Castle stood proudly in the mellow sunshine, and even the Castle House itself looked tranquilly pleasant, as we paused before its threshold once more. I went out into the large, old-fashioned garden, and there were autumn flowers still blazing in all their beauty: the terrace beds were bright with scarlet geraniums, deep blue salvias, and many-tinted dahlias; the pears and apples hung ripe and mellow on the trees; the rich bloom was on the purple plum, and the sunny apricot and the crimson-flushed peach were on the ancient walls. I walked round and round that green quiet domain, pausing once or twice before the low door that opened into what had once been the garden and orchard of the Priory, *and wishing that it were possible to pass*

through and explore those long-deserted alleys, and those moss-grown walks, shaded by the tall, unpruned trees whose tops I could see covering the slope of the hill, as I looked upon them from the upper terrace and from the windows of some of the upper rooms.

As I passed up and down those sounding corridors of the Castle House, I often thought of the interdicted south wing, and I felt a morbid desire to explore its shunned and deserted precincts. I was not superstitious; and now that I was accustomed to the stately gloom of the ancient house, I thought no more of ghosts and ghostesses; and I slept soundly in my dim, lonely, wainscotted room, haunted by rats, if by nothing else, till, in process of time, even their skirmishes within the walls, and their rushes from one side of the chamber to the other, never roused me from my slumbers: I knew the noisy, loathsome creatures had no means of ingress to my room, and that was all I cared about; they might scamper and tumble over each other in their secret runs as much as they pleased. Still I thought much of the south wing, and I longed, but did not dare, to ask my aunt for the key, that I might indulge my newly-born passion for romantic explorations. I never dared to ask her; she was evidently annoyed at my pertinacity in attempting to converse about "the haunted rooms," as the servants called them; but one day I discovered that she knew their interior very well, and, in spite of her declaration that she had never *been all over the house*, it appeared that the south

wing was by no means untrodden ground. I found this out by the description which she one day, unexpectedly, and, as it seemed to me, *reluctantly*, gave me of the room, and particularly the bed, which was the scene of the tragedy.

One afternoon I felt very dull and lonely; I had received dispiriting letters from home, and my aunt had spent the morning in her own apartments, not even appearing at luncheon, which I had taken in solitary state, in the spacious gloomy dining-room. Moreover, I had had a skirmish with Susannah, whose aversion became daily more undisguised and more spitefully manifested; and, to crown all, about four o'clock I received the intelligence that Mrs. Ryland was not coming down to dinner, and that I must perforce spend my evening alone.

What should I do with the long hours that must elapse before bed-time? I had given up study, during my sojourn at Scarby; I had satiated my appetite for inferior novels, and those of the highest order were not within my reach; I had no desire for heavier literature, and I had no piece of needlework in hand. What should I do? I asked myself, as I sat in my own room before a blazing fire, watching the sunset light fade coldly from the grey towers of the Castle opposite. Tired at length of this unprofitable and, as it seemed, unanswerable query, I rose and left the room, and began to pace the long corridors for exercise. As I passed the end of the gallery, on which the oaken door communicating with the *south wing opened*, I was surprised to see a pale light,

as of faint moonbeams, on the dark floor, and I was puzzled to know whence it came, since the only window looked towards a quarter of the heavens where the moon was *not*.

Wondering, I went up to the spot, and what was my astonishment at finding the mysterious door slightly ajar; and that it was through this aperture that the moonbeams found their way! For a moment I stood irresolute; and then I pushed open the door and looked within. I saw a long dimly-lighted corridor, generally resembling the one in which I stood, but loftier, and the carving of the stone-work seemed more elaborate. Should I go on, or draw back, now that the opportunity I so ardently desired had unexpectedly presented itself?

A doubt as to whether I ought to venture on what I could not but consider as forbidden ground seriously disturbed me; moreover, it occurred to me, that if I proceeded I might haply be punished for my temerity. Curiosity, however, triumphed. I considered that there could be no harm in exploring apartments that were forsaken by everybody; that if I chose to brave the foolish terrors of the so-called "haunted wing," there was nobody to consult—but myself. However, in order to be prudent, I stepped back to my room, and took thence a tall wax taper, which I lighted, for the daylight was rapidly waning, and the full moon was frequently obscured by passing clouds. Then it occurred to me to close the door of communication behind me, lest any one passing should *observe the ray of light*, and cause it to be locked. I

tried to close it slowly and softly; but the ponderous oak slipped from my fingers, and slammed to with a sound that echoed like thunder through the long suite of deserted rooms. I paused, much startled, fearing that I had alarmed the house; but all being still, I ventured on, and entered the first of the desolate chambers.

There was nothing very striking in this room: the furniture had evidently been taken away, save one or two antique, crazy chairs, and a table that stood on five legs, with a sixth partially amputated. The floor was dark and uneven, the pannelling black with age, the chimney wide and yawning, the grate nearly rusted away; in the ceiling were two large beams; and the window, five feet from the floor, was mantled over with creeping plants, and consisted of a multitude of very small panes of inferior glass, the greater number being broken, or altogether missing. Several more rooms, similar in appearance, and all communicating with each other, led from this apartment; but the fifth presented quite a different aspect.

It had certainly been a lady's bower: there was an air of luxury in its many antique adornments; pictures, dark and mildewed, in tarnished frames, were still on the walls, and a curious musical instrument, unlike anything I had ever seen before, occupied a conspicuous position. I set down the light, and stopped to listen as it were to the silence.

There is something almost awful in that perfect *stillness*, which conveys to the mind the utter

absence of human life. In the mountain-glen it is grand, and in the deep woods the hush of nature wakens but calmness and reverence; but within massive walls, where mortals have sinned, and sorrowed, and died; where the mementoes of the past lie all around; where once the dance was led, and the song poured forth, and passionate vows exchanged, thrilling hearts long mingled with the dust; where haply shrieks of fear and mortal agony once filled the air—it is something more!

And this I felt, as I stood alone in that ancient room; its silken hangings covered with the dust of two centuries, and its heavy furniture mouldering to decay. I doubted not that this room had been the bower of the guilty Lady Alice. Here, perhaps, she had first listened to the tempter's voice; here she had first ventured to parley with conscience; here her dark crime was first contemplated and planned; and here, doubtless, she may have spent many miserable hours, when, having quaffed the cup of sinful pleasure, she was doomed, through long dreary years, to drain the dregs of the bitter chalice of retribution and remorse. Ah! the two draughts are inseparable: he who sips but of the one must drink largely of the other. "The wages of sin is death;" and if, by the mercy of God, in Christ Jesus, the guilty soul is saved from eternal destruction, there is still much of bitterness to be endured, much of darkness to be struggled with, in seasons when the irrevocable past rises up like an avenging spectre *before the humbled sinner, who looks with averted*

eyes on the ghosts of days mis-spent, privileges abused, and mercies outraged.

At length I rose from the massive chair, where I had for a few minutes seated myself, and examined its curiously-wrought framework, and its brodered cushions, colourless now, and falling to pieces; while the gold fringe, which had been its gayest decoration, was black with age, and in some places entirely worn away. Then I touched the keys of the venerable instrument, but few of them gave back any response; and when some of the lower notes sent forth a thin discordant sound, I started, and hastily withdrew my fingers, for the harsh, unearthly voice of the old clavichord echoed drearily through the wide deserted rooms, and seemed so entirely an audible manifestation of the spirit of the terrible past, that I turned quickly away, and entered the adjoining chamber. But here I stood, as if rooted to the ground by some unholy spell, for opposite to me stood the bed, which my aunt had so minutely described: the lugubrious couch, with its dark velvet curtains, and its dusty plumes that quivered in the night breeze—for there were broken panes in all the windows—seemed like a huge spectral hearse. And there, too, was the ebony cabinet, grimly frowning, as it were, on the forsaken remnants of past grandeur.

This, then, was the actual scene of the murder; and despite all the good sense I summoned to my aid, I felt an uncomfortable nervousness rapidly *stealing over me*; and when, swayed by the rising

wind, the branch of a tree struck the window, my heart throbbed with painful violence. Ashamed of my weakness, yet conscious that my courage was rapidly waning, I resolved to make good my retreat, before my excited imagination should have time to play tricks with my senses; and feeling averse to retracing my way through the desolate rooms, I passed out into the corridor, and made excellent speed towards the outer door.

But what was my dismay to find myself a prisoner! For, on the inside, there was neither handle nor latch, nor anything whereby the ponderous fastening might be stirred. Fairly caught in a trap, and compelled to act the heroine of romance, sorely against my will, I paused to revolve in my mind the speediest mode of escape. I might not be missed for some time, and who would think of looking for me in "the haunted wing?" As to making any one *hear*, I neither liked trying it, nor believed that I could succeed in doing so; for the walls and the doors were so thick, the servants' quarters and my aunt's rooms so very far away. But then, how came the door to be open at all? It could scarcely have been left ajar by ghost or ghostess; since incorporeal beings are not supposed to be under the necessity of removing bolt or bar, when they wish to walk abroad. Some one, therefore, *must* possess a private key to those mysterious chambers; and some one there must be, possessing also sufficient sense to discredit the idle tales current in the house, *and, indeed*, throughout Luncheonster—some one who

paid visits, either openly or clandestinely, to that part of the building.

It, therefore, appeared to me, that in spite of the assurances I had received to the contrary, there must be another mode of egress; perhaps the servants, taking advantage of the utter seclusion of the place, had selected it for the furtherance of some illicit plans of their own; and in that case there would certainly be some outlet besides the well-known door in the little corridor.

So, taking courage, I turned back from the closed portal, and was comforted to see the moon shining brightly and steadily, for my taper was rapidly diminishing, and the continued currents of air from the broken casements, threatening frequently to extinguish it altogether, gave me no little uneasiness. I soon passed the dreaded chamber, and found two other rooms beyond; still more forlorn than any I had yet explored; the furniture being entirely removed, and the windows open to the sky, freely admitting the ivy and the wild birds.

"If only the windows had been a little nearer the ground," I thought, "I might have ventured that way." And seeing in the last room, under the open casement, something that looked like an antediluvian mangle, I climbed on it, and standing on tip-toe, tried to look out; but a large branch of overgrown yew completely obstructed the view, and, fearing to be left in darkness, I returned to the corridor.

Presently I came to a flight of steps very much broken and worn, and the walls were damp and discoloured, and the atmosphere humid. I hurried

down these dilapidated stairs, and found another closed door, which I greatly feared would impede my further progress. However, it yielded to my hand, and in another moment I stood in a large, lofty hall, which had evidently been a state apartment, for traces of painting and gilding were yet visible on the damp-stained walls, and the floor was of tessellated marble. At one end was a large Gothic window, in which a few fragments of richly-coloured glass yet remained, and opposite the door by which I had entered was another, by which I hoped to continue my course, for the principal entrance was strongly built up, and seemed overgrown with trees.

The door in question opened readily; but the misfortune I had so deprecated here befel me; for a sudden blast blew out my flickering light, and left me with no better luminary than the moon, which was again obscured by floating clouds.

I looked up, and saw broken arches, and a roof open to the sky in many places; and then I knew that I had wandered into the ruined chapel of the old Priory, the outlets of which were said to be closed. And now my heart began to fail me, for I was becoming very tired and cold, and I saw no prospect of escape. I felt too wearied to retrace my steps; and, if the truth must be told, terrified at the idea of going back to the long corridor, and the empty rooms, without my taper.

I sat down on a fallen block of stone, when, all at once, I heard a sound, and, starting to my feet, *I prepared to fly*, I knew not whither. But how *was I appalled*, when a tall, stately, female figure

emerged from the darkest aisle, and, gliding up the ruined choir and the chancel, knelt down on the broken steps of the altar, seemingly engaged in devotion!

Now I was not a superstitious person, nor furiously romantic; but I was certainly imaginative, and my nerves were strung to a pitch that was well nigh agony; so that now, regarding the dark form beneath the eastern window, I recalled with positive horror the solemn assertion of the vulgar, that the guilty Lady Alice still frequented the scenes of her crime and her penance, and still continued to kneel nightly at the tomb of her murdered husband—the said tomb being within that very chancel.

I suppose I ought to have marched straight up to the unearthly worshipper, and solemnly adjured her to declare her purpose, in thus roaming over the sod when she ought to be under it; but I was actually frozen with terror, and I stood motionless, with my eyes riveted on the object of my apprehensions. I dare say my hair stood on end!

At last the dark figure arose, and, with clasped hands and bowed head, began to walk to and fro in the grand aisle; but I could not see the face, for the folds of a thick veil entirely obscured the features. "She must be flesh and blood," I said to myself. "I am worse than a simpleton to sit quaking here, when that woman can certainly show me the way out: I had no idea I was so weak. God would never suffer wicked spirits to come back and scare his creatures on earth; she *must* be a mortal female, like myself: I *will* speak to her."

More easily resolved than acted on. Even then my blood grew more chill and my breath went and came in sobs; for the veiled lady turned towards me, and I saw her face—a face I had seen before, I thought—and *where*, and *when*? Only the day before, in a deserted attic, I had been shown the portrait of the Lady Alice; and there before me were the identical pale, proud features, and the raven hair. To my infinite horror, the ghost approached me, and with a wild shriek, that roused the birds in the ivy, I turned to fly from the horrible visitation, but, stumbling over a broken fragment, I fell to the ground.

“Millicent! Millicent!” said a voice I knew quite well, in accents of profound astonishment—“you here? how came you to this place?”

It was my aunt who spoke; she was the veiled lady, who had been praying in the ruined chancel, and the veil was no veil at all—only a soft black shawl she had thrown over her head, on account of the chilliness of the evening. But my nerves had received such a shock that I could not answer her, and I burst into wild hysterical weeping, to her no small dismay, for the usual remedies for such attacks were of course not procurable.

“Did you take me for a ghost?” she asked at length, as I began to sob less violently, and showed symptoms of returning composure.

“Indeed I did,” I answered: “I am very much ashamed.”

“You need not be ashamed of your fright,” returned *Mrs. Ryland*; “the place and the legend, without *my appearance*, were quite sufficient to suggest the

supernatural. But you have been very imprudent, and unpardonably curious; I warned you never to come here. Let us go back again."

"How *can* we?" I asked. "The door in the corridor was ajar; and having shut myself in, I found I could not re-open it, for there is no handle on this side."

"Then, we are certainly shut out from the corridor; but there is another way: since you have chosen to take advantage of my carelessness in not closing the door, you must learn, also, what I had no intention of disclosing. But remember, on pain of my serious displeasure, I enjoin silence respecting your adventure; you are not to mention the circumstances of the door being ajar, or the fact of my being here, or your own intrusion, or the way by which I shall lead you out of these precincts."

I had never before heard Mrs. Ryland speak with so much authority, and I submissively promised obedience. She then led me back into the great hall, and up the grand staircase to the upper story; then through several mazy passages, till we again descended and reached a low door, to which she applied a key, and we found ourselves in the open air. We were in a dry moat, of small dimensions: from thence we passed into the deserted garden I had seen from the terrace, and finally through a postern door in the wall. Then we were on familiar ground, and in five minutes I was in the house again, and in my own room, where I found the fire burned out, and one of the servants waiting *to tell me that my solitary dinner had long since been ready.*

CHAPTER VIII.

MY SICK ROOM.

Happiness, thou lovely name!
Where's thy seat, O tell me where;
Learning, pleasure, wealth, and fame,
All cry out, "It is not here:"
Not the wisdom of the wise
Can inform me where it lies;
Not the grandeur of the great
Can the bliss I seek create.

TOPLADY.

It is not to be wondered at, that I was visited that night by ghostly dreams, and vivid reminiscences of the lonely rooms in the south wing. Every now and then I woke, with a palpitating heart, only too thankful to find myself in my own bed, and not in the ruined aisles of the chapel, or on the marble pavement of that desolate, echoing hall, or trying to play my favourite pieces on the sup̄erannuated clavichord. I was quite cured of any romantic tendencies I might have fostered since I first heard of the mysterious chambers; and I resolved that, if ever again I should be tempted to undertake a similar expedition, I would set out in the broad noon-day, and ascertain, before closing any door, that it was possible to re-open it at discretion. Then, too, I was very much puzzled about my aunt. What could induce her to say her prayers in such a place, and at such an hour? Why was *she* so anxious to keep her visits to the south wing

and to the chapel an entire secret? What was it that made her so sad and silent? what weight of sorrow oppressed her soul? What was the history of her life?

It was strange how little I knew about her—and yet not so strange either; she and my father were orphans, and they had been brought up by different relatives; and up to the time of which I am writing, travelling was no easy matter, and consequently they saw little of each other. I believe the sister and brother met more than once in London; but their interviews were short and commonplace, and nearly always in society, or in presence of a third person. My father always spoke of Mrs. Ryland as moving in a sphere very far above our own. And now as I lay tossing on my bed in the dark, wild, October morning, wishing impatiently for the welcome day-beams—

“And sounds that chase the death-like images of the dark away;”

I thought more than ever on the unknown story of my aunt's early life, and my fevered fancy ran riot, as I created more than one improbable tale of her girlish days, and the first years of her marriage. Foremost among the phantasms of my imagination stood forth the gentle, lovely child, and the fair-haired father of the child. And with them I saw my aunt, in her youthful beauty, the Alice Kendrick of the lovely portrait in the drawing-room. I do not wonder that, in the lonely chapel, with my agitated nerves, and by the pale, cold light of the

moon, I fancied her like the guilty lady of Hilbree; for there was great similarity of figure and complexion, and, as it seemed to me, some resemblance in features also; only my aunt, even now, was incomparably handsomer than Lady Alice.

Lost in conjectures, I fell asleep once more; and when I awoke it was high day; and my hands were burning, and my head aching violently, and my throat was very sore. I had taken a severe cold in wandering so long through the damp, chilly chambers and passages of the deserted wing, in a dress quite too thin for the season, and shoes that were never intended to tread uncarpeted floors, or grass-grown aisles, or tessellated pavements.

I rang my bell, and Mrs. Susannah, with her sourest look, came to see what I wanted. I told her that I was too unwell to rise, and that I should like a cup of tea. She eyed me so suspiciously that I imagined she must either have discovered my adventure of the preceding evening, or else suspected me of feigning indisposition for evil purposes. She questioned me about my symptoms, and finally feeling my pulse, with her clammy, skinny fingers, predicted incipient fever of the most malignant nature. Then, with a sort of growl, peculiar to herself, she went away, muttering something in her usual surly, ill-tempered fashion. I was glad when, a little while after, I saw between my curtains the pleasant face of the nice little housemaid, as she came, bearing my breakfast on a tray.

My aunt sent me word that I had better lie in

bed and nurse my cold—a piece of advice I had no hesitation in following, since I felt quite too unwell to rise and dress myself. So all day long I lay alone, rolling my aching head from side to side, and trying in vain to settle myself in a comfortable position; and first I was hot, and then cold, and then hot again; and my throat was becoming hourly very painful. How I did long for Rose, or Susan, or my own dear mother! And then, the news I had yesterday received from home did not tend to remove my depression, which was now physical as well as mental. My brother had found employment in a merchant's office, but my father was still in search of a situation. Susan had succeeded in placing herself in a finishing school, where her services of every kind were exacted in payment for her board and instruction—I feared she was very uncomfortable. Rose still remained at home, where, indeed, she was needed; for my poor mother's spirits were at the lowest ebb, my father was becoming daily more hopeless, and the twins required some one to teach them and keep them in order.

As the afternoon waned, I began to feel seriously ill; and the kind-hearted little housemaid was so alarmed that she ventured to invade the sacred territories of Mrs. Susannah, and beg her to hasten to my room. But, instead of Mrs. Susannah, my aunt arrived; and finding me so much worse than she expected, sent instantly for medical advice.

The doctor decided that I was suffering from very severe cold, attended with fever, and he gave orders

that I should keep my room and my bed for some days, and remain very quiet, and not be allowed to do, or to hear, anything that might excite or discompose my nerves. He hinted too, that I had sustained a sudden shock of some kind; and I felt that he was right, and that my fever had as much to do with the terror I had endured, as with the damp and chilly atmosphere I had so imprudently braved. But on this head I was silent: he might hint and suspect, but I was not going to enlighten him; and it was accordingly determined, in a committee composed of the doctor, Mary the housemaid, Mrs. Susannah, and my aunt, on the ground of my own confession, that I had taken a terrible cold from walking in the garden and in the orchard without a bonnet or shawl, three evenings before.

What is the reason, I wonder, that we are always so anxious to find out the exact time, place, and cause, whence influenza, catarrh, cough, bronchitis, and other forms of *cold* proceed? "I cannot imagine where I caught my cold: I've been thinking and thinking ever since it began, and I cannot find out," said a poor sneezer to me the other day; verily I think he would have borne the indisposition with fortitude and patience, could he but have divined its source. One would imagine that finding out the cause of a cold tended to its removal, so earnest we *all* are to settle it to our own satisfaction;—it is quite a relief to the mind, and a great saving of the brain, when we can conscientiously say, "*It is going through the house.*"

Now, as I was privy to the mystery of my malady, I suppose I ought to have recovered forthwith, or at any rate to have settled into a composed state of mind, but such was not the case; I continued to grow worse, and by noon the next day I had received the impression that my aunt was the wicked Lady Alice, and that Mrs. Susannah was mixing poison with every draught she administered, as well as with the broth and tea which the doctor had ordered me to take. The result was, that I refused to take either medicine or food while she was in the room; and Mr. Rushton, the medical attendant, respectfully requested her to withdraw her attendance, observing that my delirium would continue as long as the source of irritation remained in sight, and promising at the same time to send Nurse Dent, to take upon herself the conduct of my sick-chamber.

Nurse Dent came, while I, half wandering and half in a state of stupor, was unconscious of her arrival, or of Mrs. Susannah's retirement from the scene of action; but I was soon sensible of a new and delightful influence around me. My fire burnt more clearly, and it was no longer poked with a fury that threatened to transport it bodily from the grate to all corners of the room; my clothes, that I had thrown off on the night of my adventure, no longer lay here, there, and everywhere, as best suited the temporary convenience of my attendants; they were carefully folded away in drawer and wardrobe, my medicine glass was rinsed, my table was cleared of the *débris* which people are so apt

to accumulate about an invalid, the furniture and ornaments were tastefully adjusted, and I myself refreshed by gentle ablutions, and a clean nightcap. When I awoke, as it seemed to me, from a troubled slumber, haunted by nightmare and terrible dreams, it was late in the evening. My fire burnt brilliantly, and near it, with a small table before her, sat an elderly woman, of respectable appearance, sewing by the light of a lamp, from which my weak, heavy eyes were sedulously shaded. A nicer face I had never seen; it could never have been handsome, or even pretty, at its best, and now it had lost the freshness and colouring of youth, and the neat braids of hair were white as silver. Still, it was a face that one looked at again and again, with renewed interest and pleasure; it was grave and yet perfectly cheerful; the grey eyes shone with a kindly light, and the expression of the whole countenance denoted judgment, sound sense, transparent truth, and the purest and fullest benevolence. Her dress was in keeping with her personal appearance: she wore a plain white cap, tied under the chin,—as caps were wont to be in those days, when bonnets were worn *on* the head; and a gown of some soft, dark material, unrustling, and pleasant to the touch; relieved by a snow-white muslin neckerchief, and an equally spotless apron. I lay for some time silently watching my new and unknown friend, who I felt instinctively was come to do me good. Presently she arose, laying down her work, and moving without noise; *she drew near*, and seeing my eyes open, came to

my side, and said, in a low, musical, cheery tone, that seemed to invigorate me as I listened, "Well, my dear, and so you are a great deal better?"

I *felt* better; for the racking pain and the intolerable weight had gone from my head; my mind, too, was calm and composed; the fever had left me; but I was as weak as a little child. "Yes," I replied, "I *am* better, thank you. Who are you?"

"I am Nurse Dent. Mr. Rushton brought me here; I generally attend his patients;—but you want something to drink."

How did she know that? It was true, however; my mouth was parched, and I was thinking how nice it would be to have a bucket of pure, cold spring-water brought to my bedside, whence I might help myself without limitation. She took from the hob an earthenware teapot, and poured something into a china cup, and brought it to me to drink. It was not cold, of course; it seemed like nectar; I drank deeply, and fell back upon my pillow with a sigh of content. I believe my draught was common black-currant tea, flavoured with lemon-juice.

An hour afterwards, Nurse Dent gave me my medicine, and I was no longer afraid of poison; then she bathed my hands and face with warm water, and shook up my pillows, and smoothed the clothes; and finally she disappeared, leaving the bell-rope in my hand, enjoining me to ring, if I only *fancied* I wanted anything. I did not ring, for I really wanted nothing; but I meant to pull the cord, if any evil chance should bring Mrs.

Susannah into the room. Happily she did not make her appearance, either then, or for many succeeding days.

In a short time nurse entered, bringing with her a cup of excellent arrow-root, which she set down to cool, assuring me that she had made it herself, from first to last. I divined that Mr. Rushton had told her of my antipathy to Mrs. Ryland's waiting-woman, and my dread of poison from her hands.

I could take only a small portion of my supper; but I slept soundly, and awoke in the early morning refreshed, and conscious of renewed strength. From that hour my recovery, though not very rapid, was sure; and after two or three days, I was able to lie on the sofa, and talk to my nurse, in whom, as the time passed on, I felt increasing confidence. My aunt came to see me twice or thrice every day; she was very kind, and now that the fever had left me, and I was satisfied of her identity, I was always pleased to receive her visits. She bade nurse order everything that I fancied, or that would do me good; she brought me, and sent me, flowers, grapes, and books; she talked pleasantly and amusingly, while she stayed with me: but she never once referred to our strange meeting in the ruined chapel; and sometimes I was puzzled to know whether it were an actual reality, or only one of the delirious fantasies that had tormented me at the height of my illness.

But, no; as I regained my strength I was able to think more steadily, and little by little I recol-

lected all that had passed on that eventful evening, from my seeing the moonbeam, through the unclosed door, to my return to my chamber. It was no dream; and I remembered, at last, that the cold and the terror I had endured were the cause of my present indisposition.

How I wished Mrs. Ryland would speak of that night! Her silence invested the whole occurrence with a mystery, that in my weakened state was actually painful. The contiguity of those lonely chambers weighed heavily on my mind, and I sometimes fell asleep wishing, almost praying, that the door in the little corridor, not twenty yards distant from my own door, might be built up with solid stone, and the best of mortar. Nurse saw that something oppressed me, and she tried to divert my mind by conversation. One evening I was trying to net, and she was hard at work on the leg of a grey worsted stocking, and in some way or other I discovered that she had been in the "Castle House" many times before: nay, I fancied, from the tenour of her discourse, that she had once been one of its regular inmates; and I asked her if such, indeed, was the case. She looked up from her stocking, as if rather surprised at the question, but she answered quietly, "Surely, Miss Kendrick, I once lived here, and I once hoped I should never go away. I was in this house,—let me see—eight—nine—yes, *ten* years. I left it after Mr. Ryland's funeral. We laid him out on the grand bed, in the great room over the hall. *There was a black velvet pall on the bed,*

and two wax tapers at his head, and two at his feet; and I folded his hands myself, poor gentleman, and put a sprig of rosemary between them; and I combed back his beautiful light hair, and I kissed his dear, dead face,—no one else cared to kiss it.” The last sentence was uttered in so low a tone, that I could scarcely catch the words. “I loved him, Miss Millicent, as if he had been my own son, though I was only fifteen years older.”

“What kind of man was he?” I asked, greatly interested.

“His picture is in the dining-room,” replied nurse; “and it has just his look—not the look he had when I first remember him, the blithest young fellow that ever went a-courting a beautiful lady; but the look he had years afterwards—the look that he wore when his child died, and when he said good-bye to his wife—the look that he died with, and the look that I shall know him by on the morning of the Resurrection.”

“Yes, nurse. But I did not mean his looks, I meant to ask if he were good, and clever, and kind.”

“Ah, Miss Kendrick; HE WAS GOOD. And he was clever too; and high and low in Luncester, and round about for miles, will tell you that a kinder, truer, gentler heart never beat in this cold, hard, weary world, that was not worthy of such as he was. He was just one of God’s angels walking on earth.”

“Was he ill long, nurse? What did he die of? Tell me all about it.”

"Well! Miss Kendrick, he was not to call ill for long, and yet he hadn't his health; he was never the same after his little daughter died. He loved that child with more than a father's love; it was father's love, and mother's, all in one. I came here first of all to nurse Mrs. Ryland, when the little one was born; my arms were the first that held her; I dressed her, the pretty little darling, and I took her to her father, my own self—from my arms she went to his. He wanted her to be called Alice, after her mother; but Mrs. Ryland would not hear of it; she said Alice was an evil name, and if it were given to the child in holy baptism, she would never come to good, and never be happy. She was quite vehement about it, and so she overruled her husband, as indeed she always did, begging your pardon, and hers, Miss Kendrick; and the little one was called Florence. At first I thought it a sad outlandish name; but I soon came to love it; and now I think there isn't a sweeter name in the world. I wonder if they call her Florence where she's gone. After all, there is not so much in the name as in the association; but how they came to call Mr. Ryland *Sampson*, I cannot conceive; only it's a great name with the Rylands, who are an old family, only they are Southerners, and have not been in these parts quite a hundred and fifty years. There's an old rhyme about them, that says:—

'The Rylands are brave, and the Rylands are bold;
They've plenty of pride, and no lack of red gold;
They're honest in heart, and trusty of hand;
And they wed with the fairest in all the broad land.'

And that's true enough—only I don't think my master was *proud*; he had plenty of *self-respect*, but no more pride than his baby, Miss Kendrick. And a lovelier lady than your aunt, his wife, was never seen. Luncheon had never beheld so beautiful and queenly a bride. Ah! I remember it all very well."

"But little Florence, did you go on nursing her?"

"To be sure I did; if I had been her own mother ever so, she could not have been dearer. I never had a child of my own, and so all the mother love that is in every—I mean, in *nearly* every woman's heart, was poured out on her. She was just like her father. I think I see the two now—he, so fair and gentle, yet of such noble bearing; and she, a little tripping, toddling thing, in her white frock, and her blue sash and shoes, holding his hand, or running to meet him along the garden walks. Their last walk came all too soon; she was taken ill with the croup, and she never rallied. All was done that mortal care or skill could do, but she died in her father's arms, and he never rightly held up his head afterwards."

"But my aunt, nurse—did it not almost break her heart?"

"I was a great grief to Mrs. Ryland, I don't doubt, ma'am; but she never was the lady to speak, or to show what she was feeling. My master pined and pined, and grew sadder and quieter every month. I nursed him as if he had been my own son, and he had all sorts of famous doctors; but it was of no use—he just faded away; it was a sort of consumption, they *said*, but I shouldn't call it that. When I closed his

eyes, and laid him straight in his dead-clothes, I didn't sorrow much, I knew he was at rest; and when the minister said, 'We give Thee hearty thanks, for that it hath pleased Thee to deliver this our brother out of the miseries of this sinful world,'—I said *Amen*, with wet eyes, but with a grateful heart."

"Was not Mr. Ryland *happy*, nurse?"

"No, ma'am. There is no harm in saying so, for everybody knew that much; and nobody could look at that picture in the dining-room, without knowing how it was with him. Ah! Miss Kendrick, millions of money can't make a man happy; if he could only have had his desire, he would have changed, I know, with the meanest person in the land, if so be that he kept clean hands, and a heart right before God."

"And what was his desire, nurse?"

"That I think I ought not to talk about, Miss Kendrick; I shouldn't have mentioned it. He never told me; I found it all out. But he *was* happy at the last: the night before he died, he told me how, all his life long, he had been making one sad mistake, and God had shown him his error before it was too late."

"What did he say, nurse?"

"Too much to tell you now, ma'am; for it is getting late. At the very last, I was alone with him. He said, 'I shall soon see my darling, nurse; in a few more hours I shall be where there is no more parting or sorrow. I have erred and strayed like a lost sheep; but I have a good hope—a *sure* hope, for it is *fixed on my Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ*.'

And then his breath grew short, and his countenance changed; and I rang for some one to fetch my mistress: he was gasping, and I raised him up, and so he died.

"Nurse!" I cried passionately, "this is a dreadful house! I believe it is *under a curse*; and no good, and no happiness, can come to those that live in it."

Her reply was—"Forgive me, Miss Kendrick, but that is not right: if God's blessing is on your soul, it cannot matter where you dwell. These old walls cannot harm you, though they have witnessed much sin and much sorrow; but you must trust in God and ask Him to keep you from all evil; and if ever you get low, and frightened-like, as I did when I first came to live here, say the 23rd Psalm, and that will do you good. There's comfort in it, especially in that verse that says, 'Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for *Thou* art with me.' You see, Miss Kendrick, everything depends upon whether we are God's children or not. But now we have talked enough, and it is time you had that beef-tea, and I'll just go down and see about it."

CHAPTER IX.

EPISODES.

The flinty soil, indeed, their feet annoys;
Chill blasts of trouble nip their springing joys;
An envious world will interpose its frown,
To mar delights superior to its own;
And many a pang, experienced still within,
Reminds them of their hated innate sin.
But ills of every shape, and every name,
Transformed to blessings, miss their cruel aim;
And every moment's calm, that soothes the breast,
Is given in earnest of eternal rest.

COWPER.

So much did I enjoy the quiet of my own chamber, and the society of Nurse Dent, that I was inclined to prolong the period of my seclusion to the very farthest extent. We had more conversations about Mr. Ryland and his little daughter: nurse was never tired of relating certain passages of his life, setting forth his kindness and gentleness, and his great love of truth and justice; and she loved to tell me about little Florence—her affection for her father, and her promising disposition. But one thing I could not fail to notice: nurse never referred to her beloved master as the husband of my aunt; all the anecdotes that she was so fond of repeating had sole reference to himself; and if, in the relation of her tale, Mrs. Ryland's name unavoidably occurred, it seemed only as that of an indifferent person; and *anything concerning his domestic happiness, or his*

feelings towards his wife, was strictly avoided. And I remembered, also, that, although my aunt occasionally mentioned her husband's name, she never talked about him; had it not been for the portrait, and Nurse Dent's revelations, I should not, for a length of time, have known what manner of man he was. How strange it all was! Why, my mother could not talk five minutes without bringing in "Mr. Kendrick" fifty times. And when, to our infinite satisfaction, she told us stories of her young days, when she first knew our father, and of her early married life, every incident abounded with reminiscences of his cleverness, his goodness, his funny tricks, and his juvenile adventures. In the minds of myself and my brothers and sisters, in all records of the past, the images of both parents were inextricably blended; and the few samples of wedded life that I had hitherto seen and known, were all cast very much in the same good, old-fashioned mould. But it was evident that my Aunt Ryland and her husband had lived two distinct and separate lives, and yet necessarily influencing each other's destinies; whether for good or for evil, for joy or for sorrow, I could not yet determine. Sometimes nurse told me long and pleasant tales of other families, in which she had lived or sojourned awhile; and all that she said was so kindly, so discreet, and so full of interest, and garnished with so many racy little bits of wisdom, that I could not but listen with delight and profit to her animated narrations.

One day I said to her—"Nurse, you have told me

the histories of a great many people, but you have never told me your own."

"It is not worth telling, Miss Kendrick."

"Well, but I should like to hear it, nevertheless; that is, if you have no objection. When I have heard it, I shall know whether it is worth telling or not."

"Well, Miss Kendrick, I'll tell it you, if you have set your heart upon it; but I warn you there is very little in it; all the startling incidents in my life have occurred in conjunction with the histories of other people—they only happened to me because I was mixed up with them, and they don't rightly belong to my own story."

"Never mind, nurse. Bring in other people as much or as little as you like; but begin at the beginning. Where were you born?"

"I was born in Tower-street, Miss Kendrick; maybe you know the house, for it has two high gables, and some carved woodwork about it. Postlethwaite, the druggist, lives there now; but in my time, and when my father had it, it was a draper's shop."

"Your father was a draper, then?"

"Yes, ma'am; and, if I am to say the truth, a very respectable man he was, and looked up to by the townspeople of that day. He was quite a top-ping tradesman for this little place; his shop then was the first drapery establishment for miles round, and he drove a steady, prosperous business with the *gentry, and the tradesfolks, and the country people*.

round about. My mother died young; when I was twelve years old. It's a great misfortune, Miss Kendrick, to lose your mother, and I felt it so. I was giddy and thoughtless, but I had to manage my father's house, and bring up my little sister, who was five years younger than myself; and I made no end of blunders, and got into all sorts of trouble, for my father was a hasty man; and, besides, I had to leave school. I was fond of my book; so that when I found I was not to go back again after the holidays, I took it very much to heart.

"Well, Miss Kendrick, on looking back, I don't think I had much to complain of. As I grew older, I grew steadier, and I understood things better, and managed matters tolerably, and I liked to feel that I was mistress of my father's house. And yet, I was very far from happy; I was always wanting *something* which I could not get. I was restless and dissatisfied, and I liked change and variety. Well! you will say that was very natural in a young girl, and perhaps it was; but I was not content with the little pleasures and the cheap innocent enjoyments that made my companions so happy. There was Jenny Walker next door—her father kept a china shop—if she got a new print frock, or a pink ribbon, or if she could go a gipseying on the moors, or in the woodlands yonder, that lie in the valley between the moors and the high fells, she was as blythe as a lark for weeks before, in thinking of the pleasure she was going to have, and, for weeks *afterwards*, in thinking and talking over all that had

happened. She was a nice little thing, pretty too, in a certain way, though nobody but myself ever thought her pretty. Yes; there was one other person—a well-to-do young farmer, that lived over in Furness, saw Jenny, and fancied her, and she fancied him, and they made a match of it; and she went away to her new home, near Ulverstone, and I have never seen her but once since. However, they tell me she is a fine, fat, comely dame, with ten children, and a dozen grandchildren, and she is as winsome and contented as ever, with a kind word and a helping hand for everybody. And she has more than twenty cows, and her butter is the best from Rossall Point to St. Bees.”

“Jenny must have been a very happy woman,” I said.

“Yes, Miss Kendrick, and she was a good woman, too; and one of her favourite texts was—‘Godliness with contentment is great gain.’”

“Did you ever know any one happier?”

“Yes, ma’am. Jenny was a person easily satisfied; there was more of contentment than of joy about her: but, some years ago, I saw and talked with two people who seemed overflowing with downright happiness; they did not appear to have a care or a trouble; they had found out a secret that many kings would give their crown to know; they had got, so their minister said, not the elixir of life, but the elixir of happiness.”

“Did they tell you their secret, nurse?” I cried eagerly. “Do you know it? Can you tell it to me?”

"They did tell me, Miss Millicent; but it is a secret that everybody, I think, must find out for themselves—they were happy because they believed on the Lord Jesus Christ."

"Was that all?" I asked, greatly disappointed. "Why, everybody, that is not a heathen, believes in Him. I believe in Him, of course; I believe every word the Bible tells me about Him; but it doesn't make me a bit happier."

Nurse shook her head. "Doesn't it, Miss Millicent? Then I am afraid you don't believe right."

"Are there two ways of believing, then?"

"Yes; to believe with your mind and to believe in your heart are two different things; but I cannot explain myself very well; I am not fit to teach you, Miss Kendrick. There's a better Teacher than I am, that you may have this very hour."

"Who? Do you mean my aunt? I do not think she likes talking on religious subjects."

"I mean God's Holy Spirit, Miss Kendrick."

Involuntarily I thought of my conversation with Mr. Clarenham; I had almost forgotten it till now; and I could not but notice how exactly the clergyman and the scholar, and my plain, simple-hearted nurse, agreed in the substance of their statements. How true it is, that "the carnal mind is enmity against God!" I felt a thorough distaste for real spiritual religion; I could not comprehend it, and I shrank from talking about it. I am not quite sure now, whether, on the whole, I did not think it a *delusion*—a kind of amiable weakness—at the best, *a mere enthusiasm*.

So I returned to the theme from which we had diverged—to confess the truth, the conversations into which Nurse Dent and I entered were commonly pretty discursive.

“But who were these happy people, nurse? When did they live, and what were their circumstances?”

“They were husband and wife, Miss Kendrick, and they were both old. His trade was making coffin-nails; his wife had some complaint, that caused her great suffering, and kept her always from any active occupation; they had no children, and they were very poor.”

“Strange elements of happiness,” I replied. “How *could* the man be cheerful over his coffin-nails? It was as bad as being an undertaker.”

“As for that, Miss Kendrick, custom reconciles us to everything: the first time you lay out a corpse, you feel so awed and shrinking you can scarce do your duty; but when you get used to it, it is no more than tending the sick; indeed, I am afraid habit makes us feel too little, even on very solemn occasions. But that was not quite the reason why the old coffin-nailmaker could sing, and be happy over his work; he was a very thinking man, and as he hammered away, he used to wonder to himself whether the nails were made that were to go into his own coffin and his wife’s. And the idea was not painful; he was very happy on earth, but he knew he would be happier in heaven; and he *used to talk a great deal* about dying, and laying

down the burden of the flesh, and going to see his Master 'face to face,' Dear me! he always made me think of Enoch—I am sure he walked with God."

"But I suppose he was not translated, like Enoch?" I remarked, rather flippantly.

"No, Miss Kendrick, not exactly, but very near to it. I think he knew his time was coming, for he was happier than ever; he used to sit singing hymns by the hour; and one day he said to his wife, 'Ah, Peggy, I've got a poor, cracked, quavering voice, haven't I? But I shall soon have a better—it will be all right when I come to sing, 'Worthy is the Lamb that was slain.'

"There is a hymn, Miss Kendrick—I dare say you know it—'Come, let us join our cheerful songs.' He was always singing that from morning till night; he said there was not a hymn like it to his mind. Just before he died they were badly off, for work was slack; and somebody that owed him a good deal of money failed, and he had to receive twenty twopences instead of twenty pounds. But he never gave in; he went on singing and praising God for his mercies, and his wife joined with him, and they used to tell the neighbours who pitied them, that all was right and pleasant with them, and that God would never suffer them to want bread. And he never did; though they were often in great straits, they were not left to actual want; they lived from hand to mouth, as *poor people* say, and very meagre living it was,

but they were quite content; they knew it was only for a little time, very soon God would take them into His own glorious home."

"But tell me, nurse, about the old man's death; you said he was almost translated."

"I'll tell you, Miss Kendrick, what his wife told me; I wrote it down at the time, that I might never forget it. She said, 'My old man came in from work that night, and he said, "Peggy, my lass, hast gotten anything in the cupboard?"' I said there was the best part of a loaf, and a little wine that our minister's wife had brought me. "Well," said he, "that's a feast, my lass. There's enough for to-night and to-morrow morning—what do we want more?" So he cut two big slices of bread, and poured me some wine in a tea-cup, and then he said, "My lass, I think I'll have a drop of thy wine, for the lady's sure to bring thee more to-morrow; I feel faint and dizzy like; I haven't had such a sinking in my inside for these thirty years."

"And I said, "Do, my lad, drink it all; it's not much. Thee's looking very pale and poorly. Ah! thee wants more than a crust o' bread after thy hard day's work." And he made answer, "If I want it really, Peggy, the Lord will send it me." Well, would you believe it? a minute after comes a rap at the door, and in comes one of the neighbours' children, and she says, "Mrs. Wilkins, mother's cut a fresh side o' bacon to-night for father's supper, and she thought may be you and the master

would like a rasher or two, and she's sent it." And there it was, as nice a bit o' bacon as ever I see, and we had a fine supper after all.

" 'When we had done, my master returned thanks, and got out the books—the Bible and the hymn-book—and he read the two last chapters of Revelation, and then he says, "Peggy, my girl, I'm thinking we'd better sing the old stave to-night; there's nought like it." And I said, "No, there isn't." So we sang, "Come, let us join our cheerful songs," once more—we'd sang it a thousand times, I do think, but we never sang it no more together. We made a very poor sing of it, though; my voice was nearly gone, and his was so feeble I told him I thought it had got a fresh crack in it. And he says, "Never mind, my lass, we'll sing it better soon, and our hearts sing it out loud, if our lips don't." All the while he was taking off his clothes, and after he lay down in bed, he kept singing, or saying to himself,—

"Worthy the Lamb, our lips reply,
For He was slain for us!"

I awoke about six o'clock, and wondered he wasn't up; but when I looked at him, I saw how it was—the Master had come and called him, and he'd gone before me to glory. The neighbours came and they fetched a doctor, and he said my old man had had a stroke and died straight off; he must have been dead for several hours. The next Sunday our minister preached *about him*, and he took for his text, "And Enoch

walked with God, and he was not, for God took him." And that was the way my master went to heaven.'"

"And the wife," I said, "what became of her?"

"Some Christian friends took care of her, and they placed her in an almshouse; but she died a few weeks after her husband. She departed full of joy and thankfulness; and she told her pastor, when he visited her for the last time, that she had not known an unhappy day for more years than she could count. She was buried by her husband, in the burying-ground of the chapel they attended."

"Were they Dissenters, then?"

"Yes, ma'am; but it's of no consequence now what they were. You see, a diamond is a diamond, whether it's in a plain or a fanciful setting; the setting is sure to get old-fashioned, some time or other, but the precious stone is the same always. And a Christian is a Christian, and neither more nor less, whatever be his outward form of religion."

"But, nurse, you have quite forgotten your own story?"

"My own story has so little in it, Miss Millicent; and, somehow, the history of those two dear old people seems mixed up with my own. I learnt so much from seeing their faith, and joy, and peace in believing. But I will go back to myself if you wish it, ma'am. When I was about twenty, there came a cousin from Liverpool to visit us, and nothing would do, but I must go back with her and make quite a long stay; and as my sister was a great girl by that time, my father gave his consent, and I went accord-

ingly. I thought I should be wonderfully happy at Liverpool, my cousin promised me so many pleasures, and so much company; and she was as good as her word: but after a very little while I grew even more dissatisfied than before; something was always occurring to vex me. At length, just as I was thinking that I would go home again—for I had been away from Lunechester more than three months—an event happened which changed the whole current of my life.

“There was to be a gipseying in the Eastham woods, and my cousin and myself were to go. I anticipated a great deal of pleasure in this excursion, for we were to go down the river in two large boats—steamers, you know, did not run commonly then—and we were to dine and drink tea gipsy-fashion in the woods. There were several young men in the party whom I had never seen before, and one of them was Harry Dent, who afterwards became my husband. He paid me great attention, helped me through the rough paths of the woods, and sat by my side in the boat as we came back to Liverpool. Next day, he came to my cousin’s house, and an intimacy commenced which resulted in our marriage a few months afterwards.

“I loved Harry Dent dearly, Miss Millicent. I loved him well in the pleasant days of our courtship; but I loved him far more when I became his wedded wife—so I will say nothing more of the next seven years of my life, for they were years of great misery, *and my husband* was the cause. At the end of *that time* he died, a worn-out old man, at the age

of thirty-three. Surely, 'the wages of sin is death.' I was left without any provision; I felt that I could not return to my father's house, and be dependent on him; and so I began to cast about in my mind what I should do.

"I decided to come back to Lunechester; because I thought I was more likely to obtain occupation from my own townspeople than from strangers; and my cousin in Liverpool was dead, and her husband had married again; and I had been living for some time in the London-road, in a very retired way; I seemed, as it were, to know no one in that large town, though it had been my residence for eight years."

"I wonder you did not think of keeping a school, nurse."

"I did think of it, ma'am, but I was afraid I was not qualified. At last, after turning over this scheme and that in my mind, I resolved to go out as a nurse. I knew a great deal about sickness; I had had one year of it myself, and then I had had abundant practice in nursing first my cousin, and then my own husband. I came back to Lunechester, took lodgings, and, when my friends knew what I wanted to do, they soon found me work enough, and I succeeded in gaining a respectable livelihood. Ah! many's the strange scene I have witnessed—the strange story I have borne my part in—since I began to go out nurse-tending."

"And how came you here? Did you offer yourself, or did my aunt wish to engage you?"

"Neither, ma'am. Some gentleman, whose lady

I had just attended, recommended me to Mr. Ryland, who was lamenting that his wife was disappointed of a most excellent nurse her friends in town had engaged for her. There was no time to lose, and I went directly to the Castle House; three days afterwards, Miss Florence Ryland was born."

"And you stayed to nurse her, I suppose, after my aunt could dispense with your attendance?"

"Yes. The darling took to me, and I to her: and night and day she was in my arms, for the first year of her life; you cannot think what an engaging little thing she was. I am afraid I very nearly worshipped her; as to her father, she was his idol. You know how she died, the pretty little creature; I thought my heart would break when I saw her laid in the grave. I supposed that now I should have to leave the Castle House, but Mr. Ryland would not hear of my going away, he said; he could not part with anything that reminded him of his lost treasure, and I must stay as long as I lived. I remained, therefore, as housekeeper, and the nursery became my room.

"At first, I felt very dull in this dim, gloomy, old house; and, though I had no foolish fear of ghosts, I had no liking for the south wing, and I often wished it would fall down, or that the communication between it and this part of the house could be blocked up. But, after a while, I got used to it, and I felt tolerably comfortable; and, while I lived here, it pleased God to awaken me *from the sleep of sin* in which I had been buried *all my life long*, and I learnt to know Him, and

Jesus Christ whom He has sent; old things passed away, and all things became new; and I was happy at last, my heart was at peace, for I had found that peace which the world can neither give nor take away."

"And how came you to go away at all?"

"After my master's death, I preferred returning to my old occupation. I liked nursing better than keeping a staff of unruly or incompetent servants in order; and when I told Mrs. Ryland that I wished to leave the Castle House, she made no objection. So I took lodgings again, and resumed my former calling, and I was soon as busy as ever; but I am thinking now of retiring from a life that is very wearing at my age. I have saved a little money, and my dear master left me fifty pounds, that I have never touched; it is safe in the Lunecchester Bank, both principal and interest. I shall be sixty next birthday; time for me to give place to younger women.

"I am very glad you have given place to no one yet," I replied. "I should never have got well if I had been left under the care of Mrs. Susannah."

"My dear Miss Kendrick," said nurse, in an emphatic whisper, "I don't want to say an unkind thing, but be on your guard against Mrs. Susannah. If she dislikes a person, she is apt to do them mischief; I am sorry to say it, but it is the truth. I am afraid she has no conscience, and no idea of forgiveness when once she is offended."

All of which I could readily believe.

CHAPTER X.

THE BALL-ROOM.

Whom call we gay? That honour has been long
The boast of mere pretenders to the name.
The innocent are gay; the lark is gay,
That dries his feathers, saturate with dew,
Beneath the rosy cloud, while yet the beams
Of dayspring overshoot his humble nest;
The peasant, too, a witness of his song,
Himself a songster, is as gay as he:
But save me from the gaiety of those
Whose head-ache nails them to a noon-day bed!

I WAS very, very sorry, when Nurse Dent went away; she stayed at the Castle House till the November winds were howling mournfully among the leafless trees; and then she hurried away to nurse a sick gentleman, who was given over in consumption. What a blessing she was, in her quiet, unpretending way! How deftly she ministered to the sufferer's needs, whether mental or physical; and what a sunbeam she always was, in every sick-chamber that she took under her jurisdiction! Only a little while ago, I went back to Lunecchester, to look at the old place, and at one or two *graves*. And one of them was Nurse Dent's: she had died full of years, in a ripe old age, loved, respected, and regretted by all who had the privilege of her acquaintance; and on her *tombstone*, underneath the record of her death,

were inscribed these words—"She hath done what she could."

A more honourable epitaph could no one desire; even Florence Nightingale may not lay claim to higher praise. I doubt not that, ere this, the Master has said to Nurse Dent—"Well done, good and faithful servant; thou hast been faithful over a few things, I will make thee ruler over many things; enter thou into the joy of thy Lord."

After nurse went away, I felt drearier than ever; my illness left me liable to weakness of the chest, and I could take little exercise abroad, even when the weather was propitious. A sadder November I never recollect; it rained morning, noon, and night; the wind went wailing along the lonely corridors, or flapping its loud, heavy wings round that deserted south wing, and the ruined chapel. I often wondered whether my aunt went thither now.

We passed our days very quietly; my aunt always breakfasted in her room, and since my indisposition I had done the same. About ten we met in the drawing-room, and Mrs. Ryland dispatched the business of the day, if it were not already transacted, wrote letters, gave orders, and settled her accounts. She managed all the vast property of her deceased husband with very little assistance. At twelve, or earlier, she was ready to attend to me; I read Italian with her, for it was her favourite language, and she began to give me lessons in German. Between one and two we took luncheon, and then I generally practised. My aunt gave me instructions, but always

theoretically; she would say to me, "You render that passage very imperfectly; play it so and so;" but she never exemplified her meaning by playing it herself. I never saw her fingers touch the keys of the pianoforte, or the strings of the harp; and I never heard one note of song from her lips, till those lips were about to close for evermore. And yet I knew that she was an accomplished musician, and Nurse Dent had told me what a wonderful voice she once had, and how her singing would charm into instant silence and rapturous delight the largest and noisiest assembly. I did not doubt it, for her voice, in speaking, was melody itself; and I found, from time to time, pile upon pile of her music books, full of the best compositions of the grand masters. Everything that was worth the study, whether vocal or instrumental, seemed to be in her collection; it was, in fact, a musical library, reaching, however, only to a certain date—there was nothing that was less than eighteen or nineteen years old.

About four, if we had no callers, we retired to dress for dinner, which was served in as much state as if we were expecting all the aristocracy of the county. We spent the evening in needle-work, reading, and sometimes a game of chess, or two-handed whist; but we held little conversation, and that little generally turned upon indifferent subjects: such as the common news of the town, the state of the weather, and now and then the contents of some volume, on which one or both had been engaged. *At nine*, tea was ready; and I always presided. It

was quite a pleasure to pour cream out of the antique chased cream-jug, into cups of superb Sèvres china, and to handle the silver tea-pot, that was quite worthy of a place in any cabinet of choice curiosities. The table, too, was always covered with a spotless damask cloth—a fashion, by the way, which has lately revived—and I always thought, and still think, my aunt's table linen was finer, whiter, and of more costly damask than any I have ever seen.

My aunt generally retired in good time; that is, she retired to her own room; but I doubt whether she ever sought repose till an advanced hour of the night, or rather early morning. She was always kind to me; I never had a harsh word from her during my residence under her roof; but in her kindness there was so little warmth that it chilled one more than some people's neglect. She was always calm, cold, and self-possessed; and she never mentioned her husband, except in a most cursory way; and I had not been long at the Castle House before I noticed that she never entered the dining-room, save for luncheon and dinner; that she always sat with her back to the portrait of Mr. Ryland, and that she *never* lifted her eyes to it on any occasion. Nevertheless, I felt assured that her natural temperament was neither cold nor severe; there were passionate depths in her nature which were stirred only when no eye, save God's, rested upon her. She reminded me of a snow-peaked volcano, slumbering, but not extinct; while at its base lay the wreck and the desolation born of its fury in long-departed

years. The cold grey lava has once been bright, and glowing, and fiery, in its terrible molten beauty; and as I looked upon my aunt's deep, dark, splendid eyes, so quiet and passionless in their expression, I knew that once they had shone with the light of hope, and joy, and exulting power, and burned with the passion-fires of a youth, which, compared with such as mine, was as the colouring of a Claude to the pale lines of a sepia sketch. But gayer times were coming. My aunt's circle was small, but select, and she was on visiting terms with all the county families; at Christmas it was her custom to give a certain number of parties, though I suspect she regarded the whole course of proceedings in the light of an unmitigated nuisance—a penalty which her position compelled her to pay to the conventional usages of society.

At Christmas, too, I received more cheering news from my own family. My father, after repeated disappointments, had succeeded in obtaining a situation, as managing clerk, in a large mercantile house in London: the duties were onerous enough, but not particularly lucrative. It was hard, too, for my father, at his age, to submit himself to the rule of an employer; but I could see, from the tone of the letters I received, how great a blessing this long-deferred success was esteemed. Susan was at home for the holidays, poor child! Rose wrote word that she was much paler and thinner, but then she was growing rapidly—ah! if she could but have *grown in her dear old home at Ferndown*, I thought

she would not have lost her roses, or her round cheeks. But Susie herself wrote in the most animated style; her letter was so delightful, so clever, so full of graphic descriptions, and withal so droll and *piquante*, that I could not resist reading it to my aunt, who, however, took little notice of it, except to remark that Susan would turn out a genius, if she were not metamorphosed into a teaching machine at school. But, though Mrs. Ryland said nothing more at the time, Susan's brilliant pen had done its work; when it was time for her to resume her duties, she received from my aunt a brief but kindly-worded epistle, and a cheque for a certain amount, which would enable her to relinquish her post of half boarder and governess pupil, and enter upon full pupil terms, in that establishment, or in any other she and her parents might prefer. The cheque was not only sufficient to pay Susan's school expenses for the entire year, but there remained a handsome overplus, with which she was enjoined to replenish her wardrobe. She did as she was told, and replenished Rose's wardrobe besides; and I think the twins, and their mother too, were all the better arrayed, for Mrs. Ryland's generosity to her youngest niece.

The Christmas week was as gay as the preceding ones had been gloomy; we either dined out, or received company, from Christmas-eve till Twelfth-night, Sundays not excepted; and I could hardly believe the Castle House to be its identical self, when I saw it lighted up, in all its spacious rooms

and echoing corridors, and beheld the evergreen wreaths and the exotic plants which bloomed on the grand old staircase, and heard the music resound from chamber to chamber. I wondered whether the sounds of mirth and revelry penetrated to those silent rooms, where all was darkness, and desolation, and unheeded decay. Strange anomaly! one half the mansion echoing with the voice of song, and youth, and mirth; bright with clusters of lamps, and beautiful leaves and flowers, and fair young girls, and lovely women, and all the festal array of that gay season: the other half, dark, fireless, and hushed as the grave, haunted by memories of a terrible crime and a life-long sorrow, given over to the damps and the winds of heaven, left to its slow but certain decay. It was the emblem of the soul of its beautiful and most unhappy mistress.

Early in January there was to be a county ball, and one morning my aunt, looking up from her memorandum book, said, "Millicent, should you like to go?"

Of course I should, there was no question about that; having tasted the charmed cup of festal pleasure, I was thirsting for more. I did not know that there is but *one* cup whose dregs are not bitter.

Young as I was, I had tried many a draught; but the one now presented seemed the sweetest and the most exhilarating of all.

So it was settled that we should attend the county ball, and my aunt's milliner in town was desired to *furnish my dress* for the evening. Luncheon

contained nothing that was worthy of a young lady introduced into society under the auspices of Mrs. Ryland of the Castle House. I was very glad to think my mother and my sisters would see my beautiful robes even before I saw them myself, and they would speculate how I should look in them when the eventful evening came.

It came at last, and I stood in my own room, no longer dim with the light of a solitary candle, but illuminated by a noble fire and two tall wax tapers on either side of the large looking-glass. And I stood there, fresh from the hands of Lunechester's most eminent hair-dresser; and arrayed, for the first time in my life, in perfect ball-costume. It was all complete, from the faint blush roses in my hair to the faultless white satin slippers; and when I was dressed, my aunt came in and examined me from head to foot.

"There is one thing wanting," she said to our Lunechester *modiste*, who had volunteered her services on this important occasion—"the child has not a jewel about her." She went away, but soon returned, and fastened in the bosom of my snowy crape dress a small but splendid diamond brooch with pendants; it sparkled like the sun.

I was quite ready, and I sat awaiting the summons to the carriage; and again I wondered how the "haunted wing" looked now. I fancied that hearse-like bed waving its tattered draperies in the night wind, and the frosty starlight looking in through the shattered casements on the ebony cabinet, and

the tarnished broidery, and the old tuneless clavi-chord in those silent, ill-omened chambers. And then I fancied myself, attired as I was, standing in the midst of that scene of ancient crime and penance dread. Whether the Lady Alice's room were haunted or not, *it* undoubtedly haunted *me*. Waking or sleeping, at home or abroad, at church or at the festal board, the shadowy picture of its dreary, faded splendour, and its terrible memories, was ever rising up before me—a ghost that no spell of mine could lay.

I was roused by some one calling me;—the carriage was at the door: and, wrapping myself in one of my aunt's large priceless cashmeres, I ran down the stairs to join her in the hall. Near the door stood Mrs. Susannah, eyeing me with ill-disguised aversion and scorn: it was wormwood and gall to her to see me taking my place as Mrs. Ryland's niece. She had hoped that I might quietly sink into the slighted dependent whose word and whose will counted for nothing, and who might be insulted with impunity by pert and malicious inferiors. She was bitterly disappointed, and, foiled and exasperated, she hated me, as I stood before her in my girlish pride and bloom. I carried her covert glance of hatred and defiance to the crowded, lighted ball-room; there it mingled with visions of the desolate chambers of the south wing.

But you must not suppose I thought only of the Abigail's insolence, and the gloom of the haunted *bower*. *It* was my first ball: I was Mrs. Ryland's

niece. People who knew nothing of the Ryland law of inheritance set me down as her heiress; and beautifully dressed, and in my best looks, with all the freshness of seventeen and a-half, I was voted, by the *beaux* of our neighbourhood, "a very pretty girl."

But my aunt, for all her loss of bloom and contour, for all her forty years, was the most beautiful woman in the room. Attired in rich black velvet and costly lace, her dark hair wreathed with brilliants, and flashing gems upon her neck and arms, her pale, proud face so perfect in its cold repose, she looked like a magnificent Eastern queen—the Vashti of the coarse-minded Ahasuerus—the Zenobia of the desert City of Palms.

She mingled but little, or not at all, with the proceedings of the evening; she sat at the upper end of the room with several lady-chaperons of her acquaintance, conversing in her own dignified but fascinating style, apparently pleased at my pleasure, and content to see that I was enjoying the evening in the way most satisfactory to young ladies at their first ball—having a plenitude of partners, and no chance of sitting through a single dance, unless I specially declined it. As for admiration of herself, she scorned the slightest demonstration of it; and woe to the hapless wight who dared to approach with a well-turned compliment, or a delicate insinuation of his regard; he never forgot the withering scorn on those perfectly-moulded lips, or the haughty silence with which his unwelcome flatteries were received.

As for myself, I felt my spirits rising with every dance. I was as wildly elate as on that breaking-up evening years ago, at Agenoria House—I felt that I lived, rejoiced, triumphed. I was proud of being always engaged four or five dances deep, proud of being led in to supper by the handsomest and most elegant man present; it never occurred to me to calculate how much I owed to my supposed position with regard to Mrs. Ryland and her countless thousands; or to speculate whether the same devoted attentions would be rendered, had I appeared only as plain Millicent Kendrick, a bankrupt's daughter, and attired in the ordinary costume of young ladies, who have neither full purses nor "great expectations." Ah! no one at Lunechester knew that my father was a paid servant in a mercantile house, that my mother sat up at night to mend old stockings, because there was no money wherewith to purchase new, or that my sister was qualifying herself for a governess's situation.

Among my admirers that evening—and I, or, perhaps, the reputed heiress, had many—was one who distinguished himself, in my regards, from all others. It was he who took me to the supper-room, and sat by me during the repast, and his name was Sir Rowland Lindale. It may seem strange that he, a man of forty, or thereabouts, of proud, almost scornful bearing, cold and reserved in his general expression, and by no means a favourite with women, should please me far more than any of the younger *men who paid their devoirs* during that memorable

evening. But so it was. I cared more for one glance of approbation from Sir Rowland Lindale, than for thousands of compliments received from others. True, he was not, after all, an elderly man; if a man be really fascinating, he is never more so than when he numbers two score years; but I was a mere child in age, and forty seemed quite venerable to seventeen or eighteen.

But the evening—by which term I intend to denote the hours spent in the ball-room—came to an end. At half-past three, my aunt told me the carriage had arrived, and it would not be right to keep the horses standing at that hour of a freezing January morning. My partner—not Sir Rowland, but a blythe-hearted youth, just out of his minority—pleaded for “one more waltz—just one five minutes more; it was so absurdly early; we were only just getting into the spirit of the thing; and the musicians were all the better for that last bottle of wine,” &c., &c. And my aunt, with a remembrance, perhaps, of her first ball, kindly consented, and again I was borne away; and the music was inspiring, and my partner devoted; and again I forgot the lapse of time, and was quite ashamed, on looking at the clock in the cloak-room, to find it was past four.

But my aunt did not reprove me; she was kindness and consideration itself; and in a few moments we were shawled and hooded, and led to the carriage by Sir Rowland, who handed us in with the *elaborate politeness* of that day, and, with a gentle

pressure of my hand at parting, assured me that it had been the brightest and the happiest evening of his life.

Another minute, and we were in the darkness of the inclement winter morning, and the wind came sweeping down from the hills with a mournful wail. I shivered, and was glad when the steep ascent was accomplished, and against the star-lit sky I saw the black shadows of the Castle towers.

We did not linger long together, my aunt and I; she seemed very much fatigued, and I, now that the excitement was over, was not sorry to seek repose. But sleep was long in coming; I lay restless and wide-awake on my bed, till I heard sounds of rising in the house. I *had been* happy for a few hours—yes, I certainly had been happy—but now I felt sad-hearted, and ill at ease. And, after all, had I really known *happiness*? Was not that feverish pleasure more like *gaiety* than happiness? Miserable creature that I was, must I always be doomed to stern disappointment or sickening reaction?

I arose about noon-day, weary and dispirited, and with little appetite for my breakfast. When I left school, Miss Johnson had made me promise to read every morning, before I quitted my room, a few verses of Scripture. To please her, I promised; and a sense of honour made me keep my word. I nearly always opened my Bible at random, and read the first passage that presented itself, often *with my head running* on other matters, and scarcely

taking in the sense of what I perused. The Book closed, my duty was performed, and I thought no more of it.

This morning, as I sipped my tea, I listlessly opened my Bible, according to custom; and these were the words that met my eyes:—"I gathered me also silver and gold, and the peculiar treasure of kings and of the provinces: I gat me men singers and women singers, and the delights of the sons of men, as musical instruments, and that of all sorts. So I was great, and increased more than all that were before me in Jerusalem: also my wisdom remained with me. And whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them, I withheld not my heart from any joy; for my heart rejoiced in all my labour: and this was my portion of all my labour. Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labour that I had laboured to do: and, behold, *all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun.*"—Eccles. ii. 8-11.

And, urged by an irresistible impulse, I read on, through several succeeding chapters; and always came the same mournful lament, "vanity and vexation of spirit." Alas! alas! was there really no such thing as true happiness in the world?

CHAPTER XI.

THE DARK HOUR.

Dark is the hour when guilt's deep stinging smart
Rankles and festers in the wounded heart;
The blackest shades of midnight fail to hide
The sins that in the bosom's cells abide.

The pallid cheek, the half-averted eye,
That dares not meet the starry gaze on high,
Tells what a weight of anguish, from the breast
Has chased away calm peace and holy rest.

Sacred Year.

AND yet, notwithstanding repeated disappointments, I was still beguiled, and still hoped to find the rest, and the satisfaction, which nothing in this world can ever truly and permanently afford.

After the county ball others followed in its train; and if I chose to record all that passed during those two or three months of idle gaiety, I dare say I could find matter wherewith to spin out a fashionable three-volume novel; but as I am not writing purely for the sake of furnishing my readers with *amusement*, I think it best not to enter into any prolonged account of my course of dissipation at Luncheon. Of course I made many acquaintances, some of them in a far higher rank than my own; but then, as I remarked before, Mrs. Ryland's niece and reputed heiress, and Mr. Kendrick's portionless daughter, were two very different people, though at that time *I did not care to separate them in my own mind, or*

to mingle them in other people's minds. Flattered, fondled, and well dressed, I am afraid I grew to be rather ashamed of my poor father's position; I even looked back with something approaching to contempt on the dear old home, that had once seemed to me the most favoured spot on earth. And as for the present state of affairs—the small house in the dull London street, and its humble appointments—I fear I was very much inclined to ignore them altogether, and think of them as little as I could.

Sometimes, in the midst of a gay and brilliant party, surrounded by my new friends, and enjoying to the utmost the feverish excitement of the hour, the thought of that sombre, obscure home, where my parents and Rose were toiling hard to keep up an appearance of respectability, and to secure the common comforts of life, smote upon my heart with a force which was as irresistible as it was unwelcome. And then I despised myself for revelling so carelessly in all the luxuries and amenities of society, while they, who were my nearest and dearest, were so differently—so very painfully circumstanced. “But then,” I argued, “how can I help it? It is my duty, now, to conform to the habits and manners of the circle in which I move. My aunt made choice of me for a companion, and I had no voice in the matter; it is foolish to trouble myself about what I do not see, and cannot prevent: I will enjoy the good things which have fallen to my share.”

I was growing very hard and little-minded, you perceive. *Morally speaking*, one is always greatly

deteriorated by too great an indulgence in any kind of gaiety; and the frivolous life I was leading did not tend to raise the tone of my mind, or to increase the force of my character: it was well for me, in every point of view, that my period of dissipation was but of short duration.

I had been spending a week at a place called Grangeside Hall, the residence of a certain Colonel Merriman, with whose daughters—pretty, fashionable, flirting girls—I had become extremely intimate. I had enjoyed my visit very much, for the house was full of pleasant company, and among the guests was my new friend, whom I had seen continually ever since the night of the ball, Sir Rowland Lindale.

I came home again on a bright, windy March day, and I reached the Castle House about four o'clock in the afternoon. Mrs. Susannah met me in the hall, and, in a surlier tone than usual, told me that I must not go into the drawing-room till the bell rang, for my aunt was lying down there, and she had been very unwell for several days. While I was going slowly up-stairs, wondering whether my aunt was really taking repose, or whether Mrs. Susannah interfered for the express purpose of annoying me, she called out, in her quick, sharp way, "Miss Kendrick, your kitten is dead."

Now I must tell you I had a dear little pet of a kitten; a little fat snowball of a thing, that ran after *me all over the house*, and won everybody's heart

by her pretty roguish tricks, and her merry pranks. When I went away on my visit, I left her in the care of Mary, the under-housemaid, and I had charged her to feed Lily regularly, and see that she was not shut out of the house at night. I turned quickly round, and exclaimed, "Dead!—dead!—my kitten dead! Does my aunt know? What killed her?"

"She died of pampering, and over-feeding, I should say," retorted the Abigail: "such petted, caded animals as are put out of their natural places are sure to die. She was took ill the day after you went, and died that same night, after suffering awful agonies."

"And what was done with her?" I asked, with difficulty keeping down the rising tears.

"Thomas dug a hole and buried her straight away. Laws, Miss Kendrick, sure you wouldn't have had us send for the parson, and make a funeral over her, or keep her in a coffin till you came back?" And she laughed as she spoke—that laugh that seems good for nothing but to set your teeth on edge, and make you shiver.

I went up-stairs to my own room, filled with grief, indignation, and annoyance, and there I rang the bell for Mary, that she might give an account of the whole affair.

"Indeed, miss, I am very sorry," said Mary, when I had told her what I had just heard; "but it was no fault of mine. You know I was as fond of that kitten as if it had been a baby, and I took as much care of it as if it had really been a child. Mrs.

Susannah says I over-fed it; but, ma'am, I didn't. I gave it the same saucer of bread and milk it always had, and no more; by dinner-time, the poor thing was so bad she didn't want the bits and scraps I got from cook, on purpose for her; all the afternoon she kept getting worse and worse—it was awful to see her, and hear her howls and mowls, poor creature! and at night, just as I thought she was a bit better, because she was quieter, she stretched herself out on the cushion where I'd put her to lie, and gave a little faint mew, and died. And, ma'am, Miss Kendrick"—and Mary drew closer to me, and looked at the door, to see if it was closed, and whispered, "*I think Lily was poisoned; and Thomas says he's right sure she was—he thinks nought about it; he's downright certain. And she hadn't been out at all, not since the evening before, for she slept all night in her basket, in this room; and she was frisking about till I gave her her breakfast, and afterwards she lay sleeping on the drawing-room hearthrug till she began to be ill, and missis rang for some one to take her away.*"

"But *who* can have poisoned her, Mary? Who would wish to injure such a pretty, innocent, affectionate little thing as Lily?"

"Why, ma'am, we all know as how Mrs. Susannah can't a-bear *you*; and on your account, because you petted it and loved it, she couldn't abide the kitten. And we all think she gave it something; but it *won't do* to say anything to her. Of course, she *would deny it*, and it couldn't be proved, and she'd

harbour ill-will against us for ever. So, if you please, ma'am, don't go for to say as *I* said that there was any poisoning in the case, or that Mrs. Susannah had a hand in the poor little thing's death; for she'd be sure to do me an evil turn for it."

"Be easy, Mary," I answered; "I will not let Mrs. Susannah know one word you have said; but, in future, I think we had all better be on our guard, for a person who likes poisoning cats may come to poisoning men and women by-and-by."

Mary looked scared: presently she said, "And indeed, ma'am, that's what we all say; and Thomas, he says he wishes poor Lily was a Christian, instead of only a dumb beast, and then there would be an—*an ink*—something—what is it, ma'am?"

"An inquest," I suggested.

"Yes, an inquest. The judge and jury would sit, and it would be seen whether Lily came to her end by fair means or foul; and if foul, who were the people as did it."

I quite agreed with Thomas and Mary, though I made no rejoinder; and after a little reflection, I decided that it would be better to say no more about my poor little kitten, whose obsequies had been decently performed under an old beech-tree, at the bottom of the garden.

But as I sat alone once more by my own fire, I felt very sad and lonely. I missed the engaging little thing, who would have greeted my return with *joy, and lay* purring in my lap, enjoying the

comfortable warmth and my caressing hand. I watched the gathering twilight round the great towers of the Castle, and I listened once more to the shrieking, wailing wind, that went sobbing and moaning through the long gloomy corridors of that silent house; and my heart was heavy within me. But I heard the Castle clock striking six, and I hastened to dress for dinner, expecting every minute to hear the loud clang of the bell. I had finished my toilet, however, and no summons came; and just as I was wondering what could be the meaning of this unwonted departure from regular rule, Mary tapped at my door, with a message from my aunt,—“Mrs. Ryland sent her love, and she was very unwell; and would I dine alone, and then join her in the drawing-room?”

Of course I replied that I would, and I went down stairs to my solitary dinner. I dismissed the footman, telling him I would ring for what I wanted; and, sitting down in my accustomed place, I divided my attention between my plate and the portrait of Mr. Ryland, which hung exactly opposite to me. The longer I looked, the more deeply I mused on all I had heard from Nurse Dent, respecting her beloved master; and it was a comfort to me to think that his last hours were happy, and that now he was at rest. Mournfully he seemed to look down on the spacious sombre room, and there was a touching sadness in the gentle smile that the painter had so well portrayed, and that nurse had assured me *was so peculiarly his own*. It was in melancholy

mood that I rose at length, and prepared to go to my aunt in the drawing-room.

She had been very unwell for several weeks before my departure, and I had proposed postponing my visit, but she would not hear of it. Now I was quite startled to see her looking so very ill, and I inquired with great anxiety whether she had seen Mr. Rushton? She replied that she had, but he did not seem exactly to understand her case, and that he wished her to consult a celebrated Liverpool physician, in which recommendation I heartily joined, and almost made her promise that she would write on the following day to Dr. Leicester, to desire his attendance.

Then my aunt began to question me about my visit, and, as I really had a great deal to tell her, we both became interested, and the evening passed quickly away. The next day the Liverpool physician was written to, and three days afterwards he arrived. He was a fine, benevolent-looking man, and after seeing my aunt, and consulting with Mr. Rushton, he requested me to speak with him alone. I led the way to the little study, where I frequently sat when alone; and thinking that the doctor was about to give me some directions respecting the care of the invalid, I sat down with a cheerful countenance. My heart misgave me as I saw the kind but very grave expression of his face, and his first words confirmed my apprehensions:—"My dear young lady, are you at all aware of the very serious nature of your aunt's illness?"

Very much startled, I replied that I was not; I had no idea that there was anything beyond great debility, and certain symptoms to which she had been liable for many years. Then the kind physician told me the sad truth: she was suffering from a long-seated and incurable malady,—something might be done for temporary relief,—for permanent restoration *nothing*,—her days were numbered. She herself had known her own state pretty accurately before she heard it from his lips; for she insisted upon being told his exact opinion, which entirely coincided with her own; and finally, having ascertained from him that she had not probably more than three months to live, she requested him, as a favour, to inform me of the true state of the case. And gently and considerately Dr. Leicester performed his mournful mission; but I felt stunned with the suddenness of the shock, and almost incapable of realizing what he said;—never, for one moment, had I suspected any actual danger; but then I had never seen my aunt at her worst, and in her most violent attacks she had desired her maid not to let me into the room.

I felt like one in a dream, when, having presided at the dinner-table, which both Mr. Rushton and Dr. Leicester graced with their presence that day, I retired from the room, and pacing up and down the long passages, tried to summon courage and calmness to enter the presence of my aunt. I went in at last, lingering at the very door, and touching *the handle* twice, before I could make up my mind

to turn it; but, when I entered, I found my aunt sitting in her favourite chair, looking so quiet, and wearing so exactly her ordinary expression, that I could scarcely believe in the reality of all that had been passing during the last two hours. She looked up from her book when I made my appearance, and held out her hand, and then I saw that there was something in her face that I had never seen there before—it was the gaze of one who is under sentence of death.

I meant to be wonderfully self-possessed; but when I felt the clasp of her delicate fingers, and looked into her eyes—those dark magnificent orbs, so soon to be shrouded in the gloomy solitude of the grave—and saw in them a depth of feeling, an unreserve; an affection for myself which I had never found there before, I gave way, and shed a torrent of tears.

She did not weep, though her hand, which I still held close in my own, quivered slightly, and her bosom heaved with half-repressed sighs; at length she said, parting my hair with her disengaged hand, and with a loving gentleness I had hitherto never seen in her, "Poor Millicent! poor little Millicent! so they have told you all."

"But it is not true," I cried passionately; "I have seen persons much worse than you are, and they have recovered. I have been as ill myself."

"But mine is no ordinary illness," she replied calmly. "I am not shocked, for I have suspected it for some time, only"—and here her voice trembled

a little—"only, Milly dear, I did not think it would be so very soon; I thought I had many months before me; but it is not so. God's will be done."

"And must it be?" I asked, as if in appeal; "is there no remedy for this complaint?"

"None whatever; I knew that. There are some diseases where mortal skill is powerless, and mine is one of them. No, Millicent, I must die; and—and—yes, let me have the comfort of speaking my thoughts, now that the time is so short, and I need not wish it otherwise. Life without happiness is scarcely worth having; I wrecked mine twenty years ago. Twenty years ago, every hope, and joy, and every promise of my youth went down into a living grave—even as the hapless mariners went down into the angry waves, on the fatal Scarby shore. No! life without happiness is *not* worth the keeping. I have often and often, in time gone by, wished that mine might be taken away, and now the hour of release is at hand. And yet—yet, Millicent, what if the repentance of years be unavailing! I know that death is not an eternal sleep: the worn-out frame may slumber in peace; but the soul that thinks and feels and suffers is gifted—or *cursed*—with immortality. The Bible says, 'It is appointed unto all men once to die'—that is merciful, it is a blessing for the broken-hearted; but that is not all—'*and after that the judgment.*' It is written—'And I saw the dead, small and great, stand before God; and the books were opened: and *another book* was opened, which is the book of life:

and the dead were judged out of those things which were written in the books, *according to their works.*' If I had only lived three hundred years ago, I should have built a church and founded a hospital, and thought myself secure of pardon and heaven; but I *know*—the religious education of my girlhood, and my own sense, teach me—that the expenditure of one's gold and silver, however freely given, will never, *never* wash away the stain of guilt incurred."

What could I say? Nothing. I wanted to comfort my aunt; but I knew not myself the source, the only true source, of consolation; and I felt instinctively that, as a dying woman, nothing short of the unadulterated truth could avail her anything. Besides, I knew not the sins of her youth: I had found out, long ago, that there was something which heavily oppressed her conscience, something which weighed her down with ceaseless remorse and unending anguish; and I guessed that it had reference to her husband; but how, I could not imagine. From Nurse Dent's conversation I felt quite sure that she had never loved him; and I sometimes fancied that she could not look on the portrait in the drawing-room, lest she should see, in the mild, sad eyes, a reproach she could not endure. But I knew nothing certainly; this was the first time she had spoken to me with so little reserve.

I tried to console her in my own way, and after my own dark ideas. I said, "We all do wrong, aunt—one in one way, another in another: but God

is merciful. God wills not the death of a sinner; and you know the Church says, that whosoever is penitent receives 'absolution and remission of his sins.' That is in the Prayer-book."

She sighed heavily again and again, and was silent for awhile; then she said, "But, Millicent, I do not know how much repentance will suffice for my salvation; and the Prayer-book goes on to say—"He pardoneth and absolveth all them that *truly* repent." Now, I am not sure that my repentance is genuine; I am afraid—nay, I am *certain*—it is not of the right sort; it is not my sin that I hate so much as its consequences that I deplore, and its future punishment that I dread. Oh! the dark, mysterious future; oh! that some one would come back from that unknown, unseen world, to tell us how the spirit fares when separated from its mortal tabernacle! Death is an awful mystery, Millicent."

I shuddered; I had felt *that* for many and many a day. In my brightest and gayest hours, the thought of *death* had been a spectre before me; the obituary in the newspaper, the tolling bell, the open grave, the funeral hymn, were all to me most distressing; they reminded me of that which I dared not, and yet—strange contradiction!—would fain forget—the limitation, the fearful uncertainty of human life.

Presently my aunt said, "Millicent, if ever you are tempted to do wrong at any time—to sin a great sin—to do that which you know to be *accursed of God*—take warning by me. *I might have*

been so happy. Remember this, when I am gone: sin may be sweet and pleasant for awhile; but in the end it will sting like a deadly scorpion. The sting of conscious guilt is cruel, relentless, tyrannical!—and one must bear it silently and alone; there is no escape. Oh, God! what I have suffered in these rooms—in those drearier rooms yonder, where another miserable woman lived out her weary years of penance and remorse! And now that the end is come, all is darker than ever—dark and black—black as night—eternal night! If the agony of years could atone—if I could only be assured of such a blessed end to this long, long anguish, I should rejoice in every pang, and glory in every moment of bitterness and despair.”

And so she talked on, and I felt that I had nothing to say for her comfort: I shared her fears, her doubts, and her shrinking from the dark hereafter. I—and she too—we were like ships on a pathless ocean, under the sunless, starless sky, having neither pilot, nor compass, nor chart to guide us on our dangerous way. Whither should we steer in order to gain the shore? and on what shore should we land our poor, frail barks?

CHAPTER XII.

A FAREWELL VISIT.

The deluge grows—the waters pour
Their torrents louder, hour by hour;
All, all his storms go o'er my head:
Like forest leaves in autumn shed,
I see my dearest comforts lie;
No shore is near, no star on high;
Through rayless mist I steer my bark—
O for a sure retreat—a sheltering ark!

E. J. W.

From that hour of confidence and unreserve, the spell of silence seemed broken; and, the flood-gates once opened, the long pent-up stream poured forth its troubled waters with ceaseless impetuosity. We were drawn together as we had never been in gayer and brighter hours. Still, the veil that covered the annals of the sorrowful past was never lifted; I knew not the story of my aunt's life; and though she constantly bewailed the days that were gone, and heaped upon herself every epithet of abasement and humiliation, she never detailed any one occurrence of long-faded years.

One afternoon—we had just finished luncheon, which we now took cosily together in my aunt's dressing-room—I observed that she was particularly restless and uneasy. During the morning she had suffered much cruel pain, for her fatal disease was *rapidly gaining ground*; but now the paroxysms had

ceased, and the attack seemed to leave behind it an unwonted degree of nervous irritability. Suddenly she turned to me: "Millicent, you see how restless I am; I want to go to the south wing; will you go with me?"

"Oh! do not go there," I answered; "the gloom of the place will be too much for you—and then the cold—indeed, it is not fit for you to venture."

"I will wrap myself up well," she replied, with a tinge of impatience, so novel that I should have been perplexed had I not known it to be one of the peculiar phases of her malady,—“and as to the gloom, why, there is so much gloom in my own soul, that it matters little as to the aspect and associations of any place I may visit. However, I will not venture there alone; I am growing so weak, my mind is not what it was; but if you will go with me I shall have no fear. Still, if you shrink from it I will stay away, or perhaps go to-morrow alone.”

"No," I said, "I only hesitated on your account: I have wished several times to go into those rooms and into the chapel again; I want to see them by daylight, when the sun is shining; they are associated in my mind with such ghostly memories, that I would fain see them under another and a brighter aspect."

"Very well, we will go at once, while the sun is shining. Fetch your shawl, and give me my large fur cape: there, when I have tied my small cashmere over my head, and changed my slippers, *there will be nothing to fear from the cold.*"

I obeyed her, and then she bade me go first along the corridor to see if any one happened to be about. All was silent; the servants were occupied in their own quarters, and there was no chance of meeting any living creature. I came back, and told her the coast was clear; then taking a small bunch of keys from her private cabinet, and locking the door of her dressing-room outside, she took my arm in hers, and we set out on our pilgrimage. "I lock this door," she said, as she walked along the corridor, "because no one will then discover our absence. If Susannah comes and knocks, she will fancy I am asleep, or think that I wish not to be disturbed, and she will go away again." In a few minutes we reached the memorable door, the portal of which I had crossed secretly and alone, nearly six months before.

The ponderous lock yielded slowly to the key; and I pushed open the heavy door, and found myself once more in the dim vaulted corridor of the "haunted wing." But now it was three o'clock in the afternoon, and the April sun was yet high in heaven; there were four hours of day-light to come; and whatever there might be to encounter, I should not have to meet it alone.

This time, I closed the door carefully, and discovered that it shut with a spring; and, as before, it seemed as if return into the outer gallery were impossible. I said to my aunt, that I supposed we must go back through the old garden of the Priory, *as we had done* on a former occasion; but she

replied, "No, there is no key required on this side; the mere moving of the spring, by turning the latch, is sufficient."

"But there is no handle."

"True, but I have here what answers the same purpose; this simple contrivance will enable us to return without going without the walls. On the evening when I found you in the chapel, I had forgotten to bring with me this piece of steel, which turns the latch, and, strange to say, I did not close the door after me. If allowed to shut of itself, it fastens immediately and without fail; but if gently closed, the spring, which is extremely rusty, sometimes refuses to act, and the door is left ajar. This has only happened twice, however, for fifteen years: the first time I perceived my error and remedied it; the second time you profited by my neglect, and nearly scared yourself out of your senses. But fear not, Millicent, there is nothing to terrify a sound and healthy mind—nothing to agitate an innocent heart, like yours—and I am accustomed to these rooms, and their dark and dreary associations. Let us go on."

We went straight into the boudoir, and save that the daylight showed more clearly the ruin and the decay into which everything had fallen, all was exactly as I had seen it before. There were the mouldering velvet cushions, the worm-eaten chairs, and the old tuneless clavichord, covered with the dust of two centuries. Truly, there was dust enough *everywhere* to appal any particularly scrupulous person.

Then we passed on to the bedroom; and again, though the daylight poured freely into the chamber, and though I had a companion by my side, the same irresistible feeling of awe and dread stole over me as before. This may be called weakness, but I am not sure that it was; I do not envy the person who can stand unmoved and unawed in the place where terrible crime has been committed, and where the scene is unchanged, since the wretched perpetrator and the hapless victim were together, face to face in the flesh, for the last time.

My aunt looked mournfully around her; she was paler than ever, and an inexpressible shade of sadness was on her countenance; at last she said, "And here two lives passed away; two souls departed to their final account: where are they now? Where is she, the faithless, the heartless, the murderess? They say, Millicent, that after her husband's death, she was well-nigh crushed with remorse, which those around her naturally interpreted as grief; and the wicked love she had borne the Lord of Arnsyde changed to deadly, shuddering hatred. When, with her own hand, she had broken down the sacred barriers that hitherto prevented their lawful union, she no longer desired to belong to her betrayer. She shut herself up in these rooms; she made it a part of her penance to lie nightly on this very bed, where once her murdered husband had slumbered peacefully by her side, and where, at last, slain by the poison administered by her he trusted and loved so well, he had given up *his soul to his Creator!* Here she fasted, and prayed,

and wept, wearing garments of serge, and watching by the tomb of her victim—they say the stones in the chapel are worn with her steps. At last, she could bear the burden of her guilt no longer; she confessed her crime, declaring that she had practised the severest penances, and lived in a state of the most profound humiliation for many years; but *all in vain*, the agonies of conscience remained unassuaged, and mortal endurance had reached its final ebb. She still possessed the subtle poison, wherewith she had worked her wicked will thirty years before, and she used it for the destruction of her own life, which had grown to be, to her, an intolerable burden. Thus, unpardoned, unabsolved, she rushed, guilty of her own and of her husband's blood, into the presence of her offended Maker. It is a horrible tale, Millicent."

"It is indeed," I replied; "and then to think that now we stand where she stood, in her misery and in her sin, two centuries ago—to think we see the same walls, and the same objects, that she saw. Oh! if those carved angels could speak, what a tale of guilty pleasure and its awful retribution could they record! But, aunt, if I may ask, why do you come here? The desolation of these rooms is *awful*."

My aunt paused awhile; her breath went and came quickly; her marble-like features were knit, as in deadly pain; at length she replied, "Millicent, I too have been silent for years; but the approach of death loosens many a tongue. I will say it—I will tell you—I have come here, over and over again, drawn by an irresistible impulse, because the

guilt that lay at Lady Alice's door lies also at mine. I have sinned her sin; she is not more accursed of God than I."

I started and trembled; I drew back, shuddering, with such a sickening sense of horror that I could scarcely stand. I grasped the back of a heavy gilded chair for support.

My aunt interposed eagerly:—"Stop, stop, Millicent! you mistake me; I have done nothing to disgrace the haughty name of Ryland, or your father's name—once mine. I have never stooped to actual shame; yet, *in my heart*, I wronged my husband, the best and noblest man who ever lived on earth! No poisonous draught released his weary soul from her tenement of clay; but I *murdered* him, nevertheless; I broke his heart. He deserved the purest and deepest love that woman ever gave to man—he had not mine; I never loved him, till his memory was all that remained to me. I will tell you all about it, Millicent, some day, before I die; but not now—not here, with these miserable relics of another's deeper guilt around us. Let us go on."

She stepped back once more to the boudoir, and touched with her fingers the broken keys of the clavichord; she looked round her slowly, fixing her gaze on everything in the room, taking her mute farewell of those mournful objects that had been but too familiar for long years. She intended never to come there any more. It was her last visit to the "haunted wing."

We passed on by the other deserted chambers,

entering each to take a brief survey of its decay and desolation; and at last we descended—not by the narrow winding stairs I had found, but by the grand staircase—to the spacious hall beneath. And here we paused again. All was silent as the tomb; but through the broken-arched window streamed in the golden sunshine, lighting up the faded colouring, and the ineffaceable gilding on the mouldering walls; and beyond the carved stone mullions, and the wild luxuriant ivy, was the deep blue sky, so calm, so pure, so beautiful.

“We may learn another lesson here, Millicent,” said my aunt—“see how earthly grandeur fades away. Once upon a time, this must have been a noble place; look at this damp-stained marble, at those remnants of gilding and rare colouring; at the fretwork of that shattered window, and those massive, fallen balustrades: what a magnificent hall this has been! yet, of its glory, only these sad traces remain. Millicent, it seems to me, now that life is drawing to an end, that everything in the world is a dream, a delusion. Is there anything on earth *worth* the pursuit? Suppose one may have youth, beauty, fame, riches,—the desire of one’s soul—still they cannot endure; on every earthly thing, from the flowers and the sunshine to the dearest treasures of one’s heart, is imprinted the sentence of death. ‘Passing away,’ is the motto befitting all that pertains to mortality; to the best and truest of men and women, this is a disappointing world.”

It was inexpressibly dreary to hear her speak thus, and I felt it the more, because it thrilled the inmost recesses of my heart. I had *felt* what she described—I had felt it in the morning of my days; but I had hoped that noon and eventide would bring me sweeter and better experiences; and now I heard the mournful words of one who had come to the dim twilight of parting life, and her moan was still like unto mine. Morning, noontide, and evening had passed; the night of death was at hand, and she had *not* found happiness or rest! All was “vanity and vexation of spirit.” And I said to myself, as I looked on the sad, white face before me, and the ruins of a faded past around me, “Why is it so? Is there no such thing as happiness?—why, then, were we born? Better a thousand times never to have existed, than to linger out the miserable years in vain hope, and restless longing, and following after cruel, mocking phantoms of bliss, that beckon one on, further and further, into the darkness of despair. She is right, there is nothing on earth worth one moment’s anxiety.” And so I mused in that lonely place of faded splendour, and my heart was very, very sad; for I felt within myself such large capacities for happiness, which, as it seemed, could never be satisfied; such irrepressible yearnings; such an aching void, never, never to be filled! I could almost have cried, in the bitterness of my spirit, “Let us eat and drink, for to-morrow we die!” O for a refuge from despair! O for an ark of *safety and peace!*

I thank my God that, despite my hard heart and my unbelief, He led my wandering feet in His own good time to the Ark, wherein every weary, sin-laden soul may find perfect repose and security, with ever-increasing, never-fading joys! I will subjoin here some verses I wrote many years afterwards, when God had filled my soul with the spirit of thanksgiving — when I had found my rest, my unfailing happiness, for time and for eternity.

Thou art the *Ark*, Lord! *only* Thou;
No other refuge will I know;
To Thee with loving haste I come;
I fly to Thee—O! take me home.
I leave my spirit in Thy hand;
I quit this once-alluring land,
And make with Thee my safe abode,
Where I may rest, and cast away my load.

And then, if earth, and seas, and skies,
Commingling till the tempest rise
On every mountain top and height,
And chaos reign again, and night;
Though quenched be every vital spark,
Yet I, in my *Eternal Ark*,
May watch unmoved that rising storm,
Nor weep with dread, nor tremble in alarm.

Rememberest thou the ark of old,
When Jesus did in types unfold
His sacrificial plan and grace
To chosen Israel's erring race?
How first it crossed the Jordan's stream,
When, cleft as by electric gleam,
Each proud wave rose in calm retreat,
And left a path for Israel's weary feet?

So now its Antitype doth go
Wherever waters overflow:
Once through the floods of grief He trod;
Once the chill grave was His abode;

Now, when His children's tears down fall
O'er blighted love and funeral pall,
They look beyond the deathly dark,
To meet the loved and lost, in Him—their Ark.

Oh, come, poor mourners, come away;
Why on life's ocean will ye stay
Without a shelter? Well ye know
Grief darkens brightest hours below:
The worm hath twined the floweret's root;
The spring-bird's melody is mute;
The summer day is waning fast:
O, hide thee till the woe be overpast.

There, too, thy guilt, thy sin will be
Cast to the bottom of the sea,
And robes of righteousness be thine—
O, haste thee to that blessed shrine:
Linger no more; but join the throng
Who view the tempest waxing strong,
While torrents swell o'er rock and mark,
Yet safe abide "*in Christ,*" the only Ark.

I do not pretend to say there is much poetical merit in these verses; I dare say they contain many errors of composition, but I think they contain something else besides—something of infinitely more importance than beauty of style and originality of thought—though both are greatly to be prized—I mean the *truth*, as it is revealed in Christ Jesus, our Lord, and only Saviour; the only way of peace and joy, and un-failing satisfaction, here and hereafter.

But then I had not found my rest, my ark of refuge. I was looking to the creature for that which is to be found only in the Creator; seeking that on earth which is to be attained only in heaven, and in the hope of everlasting life. With a sad heart I

turned away from the ancient hall and entered the ruined chapel.

In the golden sunlight, and with the soft blue sky shining through the broken roof, it looked far less ghostly than when I had seen it before, in the pale, uncertain moonbeams. It had never been a very imposing edifice, and now it was sinking quietly to decay; and the words of the Psalmist—"Yea, the sparrow hath found an house, and the swallow a nest for herself, where she may lay her young, even thine altars, O Lord of Hosts, my King and my God!"—were literally verified; for the birds were even then busy with their nests in the branches that almost formed a natural vaulted roof over the dilapidated chancel.

We lingered a little longer here, for the scene was very fair to the eye: the grey, mouldering arches; the tender green of the fresh springing ivy; the bright verdure of the grassy carpet, and, above all, the deep blue cloudless firmament, looking down as with an eye of love on the ravages that time had wrought, formed so beautiful a picture, that, amid all my sad and solemn memories of that desolate south wing, this one of the grey little chapel stands out from all others,—calm, and serene, and peaceful, in the sweet sunshine of that pleasant April afternoon. We said but little here, for our hearts were full; and at length we turned away, taking a long last gaze at the quiet, ruined sanctuary. I never saw it again; for when, years afterwards, I visited *Luncheon*, I found that the south wing

and the chapel had been taken down; the Castle House had been modernized; and on the very spot where I had mourned the faded splendours of the large hall, and where, for the moment, I had fancied myself the subject of a supernatural visitation, a newly-erected stone villa, with freshly-painted palisades, and young evergreens, and smooth gravel walks, and plate-glass French windows, reared its imitation Gothic glories. It was called "Priory House;" and further down the slope of the hill, on what was once the Prior's garden, stood a row of pretty little tenements, resplendent with paint and stucco, called "Priory Terrace."

"So runs the world away."

Once more, and for the last time, we retraced the long corridor; but we did not enter any of the rooms, for my aunt was exceedingly tired, and I was anxious to see her on her sofa in the dressing-room. As I had expected, this valedictory visit to her secret haunts was too much for her: that evening she had a violent access of her disease; but she did not send me away, as had always been the case before; she did not even ring for Mrs. Susannah; but told me where to find certain medicines, and bade me pour them out according to the written directions. Quite late at night, she became easy and inclined to sleep, so she ordered me away to bed, promising to send for me if she were at all worse. But before I left she spoke again of the Lady Alice's sin, in connection with her own, and promised to tell me her

story very soon, "perhaps to-morrow, for the time will be short." The last thing, she said, "Millicent, when you were born your father wished to call you Alice, but I entreated him not to do so; I told him *never* to give any girl *that* name. Some day, probably, you will be a mother yourself; and then, if you are inclined, out of affection for me, to call a little daughter *Alice*, forbear! Alice is an evil name; for it is mine, and it was hers, who sinned in yonder rooms. It is an evil name—Alice—an evil name!"

"It is a very sweet name," I replied, "and it will be all the sweeter to me, because it is your name. I should like to call you Aunt Alice."

"No, no," she said sadly; "it is an evil name, an evil name; she and I have made it so."

"Poor auntie! how I was beginning to love her! And how soon that which I loved would be taken away from me! Poor Millicent!"

CHAPTER XIII.

MY AUNT'S STORY.

I offer up affections
Void, violent, and vain ;
I offer years of sorrow,
Of the mind and body's pain.

I offer up my memory ;
'Tis a drear and darkened page,
Whose experience has been bitter,
And whose youth has been like age.

L. E. L.

A DAY or two afterwards, I was rather surprised to receive a visit from Sir Rowland Lindale. He had been visiting in a neighbouring county ; otherwise, he assured me, I should have seen him immediately after my return from Grangeside Hall. He was more agreeable, more fascinating than ever ; and in his society, talking over the little adventures of the winter, and discussing our mutual acquaintances, I quite forgot, for awhile, all the sorrow and gloom that was weighing so heavily on my heart. He staid to luncheon, and, from one or two things that passed, I could not help seeing that he was behaving, and apparently feeling, much more like the lover than the friend.

I grew nervous, for, vain as I was, and greedy of admiration, I had sufficient right feeling left to feel that an offer of marriage is a very serious thing, indeed. And I trembled, when we were left alone,

lest every moment the decisive words should be spoken. I knew not whether I was the more relieved or disappointed, when at last he took his departure, without making any declaration. But the next day, the proposal came; Sir Rowland, with all his fashionable ease of manner, professed himself a shy man, and he preferred writing. He wrote both to my aunt, and to myself.

I sat a long time over my solitary breakfast, with his letter in my hand, pondering what I had better say in return. I admired Sir Rowland Lindale excessively, but I felt sure I did not love him; I doubted whether I ever could; and yet I hesitated whether I should not become his wife. A girl's first offer is always an era of great importance; but this was no common offer: my lover was well born, rich, handsome, and a model of elegance; moreover, he would make me "my lady." And then, every woman for miles round had been wanting him, and scheming for him, for herself, or for her daughters—at least, so Report, in her usual coarse unscrupulous fashion, had asserted.

And I—certainly not a beauty, or a grace—had been the selected one; and if I refused him no one would ever be the wiser; whereas if, on the contrary, I accepted him, the triumph would be great, and, as Lady Lindale, I should take precedence of very many of my friends and acquaintances. So I mused, alternately sipping my coffee, without recognizing its flavour, and reading my letter, my first love-letter! *Unworthy Millicent Kendrick!* I am ashamed

to write such stories of my youth; but I determined, when I commenced writing this autobiography, to tell the truth, the *whole* truth, and nothing but the truth. If the history of one's life is to be useful to others, it must be written without reserve; every weakness, every failing, and every tendency to evil must be confessed. There is not much danger of exaggerating our own faults; for one can hardly be too strict as regards one's self, nor too lenient as regards others. When I went to my aunt, blushing, and looking, I doubt not, very foolish, I found her also with a letter from Sir Rowland in her hand; and she bade me sit down, that we might talk the affair over at our leisure. "Tell me, Millicent," she said, kindly but very gravely, "tell me the secret of your heart; do you *love* this gentleman?"

I hesitated—at length I said, "No! aunt, I am sure I do not love him; but I *like* him, and perhaps if I married him I should care more about him. I have heard many people say, a passionate devotion to one's husband is very pleasing in romances, but not at all essential to the happiness of real married life. Miss Everleigh, who is engaged, you know, says that those marriages are the happiest which are founded on esteem, and a moderate degree of affection."

"Believe it not, Millicent," cried my aunt hastily: "marriage is God's holy ordinance, and they who enter upon it without the deepest and most exclusive attachment to each other, sin against him. Yes, *and they sin* against themselves, and against each

other. I told you I would tell you the story of my own life; I think it had better be now; I am feeling very well this morning; and I feel, too, as if I could bear to go back to the past, which, like a spectre, has haunted me all these weary years. Listen, then, Millicent, and do not blame me more than you can help. And from the history of my sins, and their consequent sorrows, try to learn the lesson that came to me too late.

"I dare say your father has often told you of our Aunt Frances, who adopted me very early in life; with her I spent my childhood and youth, and to her I owe the finished education which, reckless of trouble and expense, she made it her study to provide for me. I suppose I may say now, without vanity, that I grew up to be a very beautiful young woman; I possessed also many accomplishments, which are rare, even now—in that day they were truly marvellous. But the fair promise of my youth was blighted by two besetting sins—*pride*, and its twin-sister, *ambition*. I was fearfully proud, and, for a girl, detestably ambitious. I had been reared in much luxury; I knew how very beautiful I was, and I haughtily determined that no man who could not give me both rank and fortune should ever win my hand. I had many suitors, even while I was a mere child, but not one of them found favour in my eyes; but at length the person appeared whom I was to love.

"How he came to love me, I cannot divine, for my character was far inferior to his: how I came

to love him, I cannot tell; but very soon he was more than all the world to me. His name was Horace—a name that even now, after the lapse of long years, I tremble to speak. You have no idea, Millicent, what a wild, passionate nature mine is; and very soon the love I bore Horace bordered on an idolatrous worship. We were betrothed, and for a time I was strangely, almost deliriously happy: then came a period of trial: the gold and the dross that was in me had to be weighed in a balance, and alas! the base material most fearfully preponderated. I had believed that Horace was rich; but when he came to explain his plans and his prospects, it appeared that his worldly wealth was little more than his own natural goodness and large-mindedness. Still, disappointed as I was, I could not make up my mind to discard him, for I loved him—yes! with all the wretched ambition of my temperament, I loved him passionately. Our engagement continued, though the idea of marriage was for the present out of the question; and he, blind to my faults, and devoted to me, thought himself the happiest of men.

“But by-and-by my proud ways began to hurt him; and I saw it, and resented it accordingly. I made him very miserable, but I was not less miserable myself;—

‘For to be wroth with one we love,
Doth work like madness in the brain.’

“The estrangement grew, and it was all my fault. *knew afterwards*, and I suspected then, that my

temper was unbearable: it was not irritability, or undue warmth, or sullenness, but the very incarnation of pride itself, in my person. And what would I not have given, had Horace been as richly endowed with this world's wealth, as with the most precious gifts that Heaven can bestow upon mortal man! My love for him, and my contempt for his mean condition, as I insolently called it, were for ever warring at my heart, and wearing out my life with secret, ceaseless struggle. I almost think that, at that time, Milton's well-known words would have suited me exactly:—

‘Better to reign in hell than serve in heaven.’

Well, Millicent, I nourished that serpent pride in my heart till it well-nigh crushed out all the finer and purer elements of my character—love, truth, fidelity—all became torpid beneath its numbing influence. We seemed born—Horace and I—to be mutual tormenters of each other.

“At length there came a crisis; in my madness I insulted him, and he went away from the place where we both lived. I thought he meant to frighten me, and I only smiled in my foolish scorn, believing that he could never remain absent from me for many days, and determined never to recall him, let it cost me what it would. But time passed on, and he came not back, like a subdued rebel, to sue for pardon at my feet; and I—was *I* to relent? I knew that he *was* waiting only for one word, *one little token from me*; I knew that I had but

to smile and see him once more my devoted lover; ah! *that* he always was—it was because he would not be my abject *slave* that I quarrelled with him.

“Things were in this state when Mr. Ryland, then a young man of four-and-twenty, made his appearance among us. I know not what sin he or his fathers had committed, that so great a calamity as loving me should have befallen him. But he did love me, even at first sight. He was very unlike Horace; quieter, more reserved, and far less demonstrative in any way; but when he once placed his affections they were never withdrawn. He acted seemingly without impulse, and always very gently; but what he once did, he did for ever. To his great misery, to the utter destruction of his happiness, he loved *me*, and, believing me to be a disengaged person, he sought my hand. Just then I was very wroth with Horace, and thought only how I could make him suffer for this lapse of allegiance. I neither refused nor accepted Mr. Ryland; but I allowed him to visit me, and to pay those attentions which an honourable woman ought only to receive from the man she has accepted, or means to accept, for her husband. I knew that Mr. Ryland was a rich man; but I did not know for some time how exceedingly wealthy he was, nor in how high a position he was able to place his wife.

“One day he pressed me for a definite answer; and I, exasperated at Horace’s long silence, said, ‘*Yes!*’ Oh, most fatal monosyllable! Could I but have foreseen half the misery I was to cause! My

aunt was delighted; she knew the Ryland family well, and she had never imagined that, with the little portion she could bestow, I should ever marry so advantageously; and she applauded my choice, and did her utmost to further Mr. Ryland's wish for an almost immediate marriage. Splendid preparations were made; the presents I received from my betrothed were of the rarest and most costly description; and in my own circle I became the heroine, the *envied* heroine of the day; for no one, save my aunt, knew of my engagement to Horace. I had always thought it beneath my merits, and stipulated for the profoundest secrecy—much to Horace's chagrin, for this regulation of mine placed him under many restrictions more rigid than agreeable.

“Meanwhile there was no word of Horace, and I said to myself, though my heart repelled the accusation, that he was fickle and inconstant, and that he would never have made me happy. Ah! all the time I loved and prized one glance of his, a thousand times more than all Mr. Ryland's tender, ardent, chivalric devotion. Nevertheless I became his wife:—I stood at the altar, and, in the presence of God and of his minister, I plighted my faith to one man while my heart was wholly given to another. How I shuddered—what a pang shot through my heart—when the clergyman solemnly pronounced us, in the name of the Holy Trinity, ‘*man and wife!*’ And now the die was cast; it was too late to recede; I was the wedded bride of Sampson Ryland.

“*That very day, utterly ignorant of what had*

taken place, Horace came back. He had been far away in a lonely Cumberland village, where he was attacked with fever, and there, for many weeks, he had lingered between life and death. When convalescent, he returned to his lodgings at York; where, to his grief and surprise, he found no letter from me. He waited and waited, longing for one relenting word, but in vain; then he resolved to merge all—pride, self-respect, even sound judgment—and return to the tyrannical mistress of his affections. *He came too late.* We had one interview; but what passed I cannot now recollect; I think we were both partially insane; I only remember that he bitterly reproached me, and that I had not a word to say, for the reproaches of my own bosom were far bitterer. We parted—he, to drown in recklessness the great sorrow of his life; I, to endure a living death, as the wife of the man who loved me, as surely never woman was loved before.

“We went abroad; and even then I might have been happy. Having married Mr. Ryland, I ought to have banished from my mind, and from my sight, all memories of my former love: the great marvel to me now is how I could *help* loving my husband; he was so good, so noble, so tender, so gifted with all that makes a man lovely and loveable in the eyes of most women.

“Very soon the shadow that rested on my path fell also on his—he found that the coldness of which he had complained both before and after our marriage *was not* maidenly reserve, or an excessive delicacy,

as my aunt had said; and great was the anguish of his loving heart. We came back to England, to this house, where he was born, and his father before him. All places were alike to me, for I was fast sinking into melancholy; but the gloom of this old house oppressed me beyond endurance, and every day I felt more and more like stone towards my unhappy husband. He tried every means to win my affection—ah! how angelically patient he was; how generous, how forbearing, how truly noble! If the Rylands had been a race of scavengers, he would have ennobled them all.

“One day I read Horace’s marriage in the newspaper, and I was like a mad creature. In my wicked temper, I tried to torture my husband, who had never wronged me by thought, deed, or word; and I told him all the truth, with a recklessness, and a fierce, cruel triumph, that proved how lightly I esteemed his authority and how little I cared for his wounded peace. He heard me to the end, and satisfied himself that I was not raving; and then he said quietly and sternly—the only sternness I ever saw in him—‘Alice! you have deceived me. How dared you marry me, when I was indifferent, nay, almost hateful in your eyes? You have sinned against God; you have sworn a lie!’

“Then he went away, and for many hours I saw nothing of him; but during that time I came to my senses, and regretted the part I had taken. When Mr. Ryland met me again he held out his hand, and on his pale face was that sweet, sad

smile, that has haunted me ever since. I saw it last,—the smile that you may see on the portrait in the dining-room. He said, ‘Alice, you have done wrong, but it cannot be helped now; we are married, and I cannot set you free, if I would; let us strive to do our duty to each other, and, forgetting the past, press onwards to a future, wherein we may find peace, if not happiness. Soon there will be other ties to bind us together; let us hope for better days.’

“I was touched at his gentle, dignified forbearance, and I answered softly, that I was sorry I had wronged him, and that he deserved a better fate than to have for his wife a woman without a heart. I, too, thought of the new bond that would soon be between us. That time came, and my little daughter was born. I would not have her called Alice, as her father wished, so she received at her baptism the name of Florence. Truly, she was like an angel in our dark, sombre house; and yet she failed to knit the hearts of her parents in one; but she was her father’s joy and solace, and his happiest hours were spent in nursing her and sharing her baby sports. While she lived, his life, which had seemed like a pale, withered flower, revived, and his step was light again, and his beautiful smile had in it more of joy than of pen- sive regret. And through all, he loved me so fondly! He gave me now a double love: I was the wife of his youth, and the mother of his child; if he could have shed his heart’s blood to



make me happy, I believe he would have done it gladly; and yet, *my* heart remained like marble. He was 'Mr. Ryland' to me, nothing more—not the husband who had made me bone of his bone, and flesh of his flesh—not the father of my one fairy little child, my lovely baby Florence. My affections were all with the past—the present was nothing—the future, a dreary void.

"You will say, Millicent, did I not love that sweet and beautiful child, my only one? Yes, God knows I loved her; but she was so much like her father, that, at times, I felt it impossible to evince any tenderness for her, and I never allowed *him* to see me lavish caresses upon her—he never knew how dear she was to me; for even there my demon pride stepped in, and shut him out from the purest source of earthly comfort. He thought I could not love my babe, because she was *his* child. And, truly, I often thought how infinitely dearer she would have been were she Horace's child. Do not shrink away from me, Millicent; I know I was very wicked.

"Well, the time came, all too soon, when God took away our little daughter to his own bright heaven; and from that hour her father drooped, and fell into a weak state of health. She died before Nurse Dent could revive the little lifeless body; for she was indeed taken from me before the mournful truth, that I had lost her, had the same again. I was left a helpless home, and my

smile, that has haunted me ever since. I saw it last,—the smile that you may see on the portrait in the dining-room. He said, ‘Alice, you have done wrong, but it cannot be helped now; we are married, and I cannot set you free, if I would; let us strive to do our duty to each other, and, forgetting the past, press onwards to a future, wherein we may find peace, if not happiness. Soon there will be other ties to bind us together; let us hope for better days.’

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"Well, the time came, all too soon, when God took away our little daughter to his own bright heaven; and from that hour her father drooped, and fell gradually into a weak state of health. She died in his arms, and it was long ere Nurse Dent could persuade him to give up the little lifeless body; for he could not believe that she was indeed taken from him. When finally convinced of the mournful truth, he fainted away, and he never looked the same again. Sadder and sadder grew our childless home, and my

heart grew heavier and colder than before. A few more years passed away; sometimes we were at Luncheon, and sometimes at our house in London; occasionally we entered into society, and received our friends; but, on the whole, we had a secluded, uneventful life. All this while my husband was a sad and reserved man, and after Florence's death he never gave utterance in words to his sorrow, never complained of my unloving bearing towards him, but his heart was silently breaking.

"Blind creature ~~that~~ I was, I never saw the end that was coming, till a very short time before he died, and then Nurse Dent told me that the doctors had said he was not long for this world. Ah, I did feel then how cruel and bitter had been my conduct; the first stirrings of affection towards him troubled my heart; my impulse bade me go and lavish on him all the tenderness so long withheld: but now, as ever, my wicked pride conquered, and he never knew that at the last I prayed wildly that God would spare his life, so strangely precious now that it was passing away. He loved me to the end; he was perfect in constancy, as he was perfect in all but physical strength to withstand the wearing pain of his unrequited faithful love; he was happy, too, when all prospect of recovery was lost, and he used to say to himself, 'Light at evening-time! Thank God for this blessed light at evening-time.' And towards me he was tenderer than ever. One evening I sat alone in the drawing-room, when *the door burst open*, and a servant said nurse had

called for me; I must go that instant. I went, Millicent, my heart sinking within me, yet determined to throw myself at his feet, and say, 'Husband, forgive me; live for my sake; your mighty love has conquered at last; you are *very* dear to me now.' Millicent, I looked on the face of the dead; his sorrows were over, his broken heart was healed; he was at rest, with his little darling who went before. Where they are gone *I* shall never go.

"From that hour the bitterness of my punishment began; no tongue can tell the anguish of my unavailing repentance. And so it has been till this day; only your love, Milly, has been like a bright star in a gloomy sky. And this is the history of my life. Profit by it, my dear child, and seek to do that which is right and true, and be humble always, lest, like me, you should come to the close of mortal life, and look back upon a dreary, useless waste of existence, and forward, with a trembling spirit, into the dark, mysterious future."

CHAPTER XIV.

SUNSET.

At evening-time let there be light;—
Life's little day draws near its close;
Around me fall the shades of night—
The night of death, the grave's repose,
To crown my joys, to end my woes:
At evening-time let there be light.

J. MONTGOMERY.

THAT evening, Sir Rowland Lindale received his final answer; he was courteously but firmly refused. I hoped he would not grieve very much, nor go into a consumption, nor turn reckless and bitter like my aunt's poor Horace, and I did not feel at all certain that he would at once take "*no*" for an answer! But he *did*, and he seemed none the worse for the disappointment; he neither pined away nor pursued me with his reproaches, and he never gave me the opportunity of re-considering my somewhat hastily-formed decision. Perhaps he was not sorry to find himself free to form a higher and more brilliant alliance; perhaps it was whispered to him, that I might not after all be the heiress of Castle House; perhaps he reflected that such charms as I possessed were entirely dependent on youth, and early bloom, and a judicious toilet—in any case, he seemed in no wise inclined to wear the willow for my sake, for I met him a few days afterwards in the evident *enjoyment* of health and good spirits, and before the

expiration of many months he was married to a certain Flora Gifford, an accredited beauty, and the actual possessor of an immense fortune; to say nothing of her aristocratic connections, which were many and distinguished, and her manifold accomplishments, principally acquired by means of a Continental education.

And so terminated my first love affair, if such it could be called; and I made up my mind that love-making might be very interesting in books, but it certainly was very insipid and unromantic and unsatisfactory in real life. And nobody was the wiser; no one knew that I had had the distinction of refusing Sir Rowland Lindale; and I am afraid I found this phase of the affair rather mortifying.

But I had little time then to give to any passing regrets; my aunt became rapidly worse. Nurse Dent came to the Castle House again, and I was rarely out of the invalid's room. Once more, after the lapse of years, the shadow of death rested on the grand old mansion: the last of the trio who had dwelt there together, united in the closest of natural ties and yet so unallied in heart, was about to pass away from the sad and stately home that had been gloomy and lonely so long.

Several weeks passed, and my aunt's depression increased. To me she was very gentle and affectionate, and she often reverted to the story of her married life, as she had related it a few evenings after our visit to the south wing, describing many little *passages of the days* that were gone, and always

speaking of her husband with unspeakable reverence, and a tenderness that was a mournful compound of vain yearning and passionate regret! O! why was love so tardy? why did not her proud heart melt before it was too late—too late for earthly reparation of the greatest wrong that a woman can inflict on a generous and true-hearted man?

I could only listen and share her sorrowful lament—I could only discern the anguish of her spirit, and lavish upon her every care, every tender caress; but I could apply no healing balm to the wounded heart, nor offer any cordial to the sinking soul; I could not impart that which I did not possess; I would fain have comforted her, but I knew not what consolation to offer.

But there was one wiser and happier than I was. Nurse Dent, in her simple way, told her of the one Hope, the one Refuge, the one sure and everlasting Consolation of sorrowful humanity. She was no theologian, no propounder of intricate doctrines, but she had always an answer ready in any and every emergency; and her plan was, to say nothing of herself, but to take from her pocket her little Testament, and quietly read aloud the text or texts that her experience taught her were most apposite to the occasion. And now, when "her lady," as she once more called my aunt, was sinking under the intolerable weight of conscious guilt, and an overwhelming dread of the fast-approaching end, Nurse Dent's favourite key *note*, which she struck from hour to hour, was a

passage from the Gospel of St. John the Beloved, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world."

I listened to the holy, thrice-blessed words, as twenty times a day I heard them from the lips of our humble friend, and they conveyed to my dark and torpid mind no other acceptation than that which the literal meaning of the words afforded. I believed them theologically—my intellect embraced them as an article of Christian faith, but not my heart; and they influenced my life no more than did the canons of Buddhism. Not so obdurate was my aunt: the world, with its long-forgotten joys and its ever-present sorrows, was fading rapidly away; for her the fast-flowing stream of time was ready to mingle its swift waves with the boundless ocean of eternity, and she was looking eagerly for a light to guide her safely over the billows into the haven of everlasting rest.

And so it came to pass, that the day-star arose in her heart, the darkness gave place to dawn; then uprose the glorious sunlight of Gospel comfort, and the radiance waxed clearer and brighter, until faith and hope were swallowed up in the realization of heaven itself. And I—I marvelled greatly.

My aunt made every necessary arrangement as regarded her worldly concerns, and many of her jewels, and some of her favourite books, and the costly *bijouterie* of her toilet and her boudoir she placed in my hands without further delay. "These were mine," she said—"mine, to do with as I

thought fit; she had done with them, and would never need them more." Then she spoke of her testamentary arrangements: the Ryland property reverted of course to the Ryland family; a younger brother of my aunt's husband claimed the whole as lawful heir; for though everything had been left unreservedly at her disposal during her life-time, it was provided that at her death all should return to his kindred. So that my aunt had no power to will away any portion of the very handsome income she had been receiving during her widowhood.

Nevertheless, she had always lived considerably within her means; and she now told me that I should find, after her demise, a moderate, but sufficient portion for all my needs, enough to free me from the necessity of working for my livelihood, and to raise me above dependency of any kind. Moreover, my sisters, she informed me, were not forgotten; and there was the sum of one thousand pounds for my father. Nearly all the plate, and the most valuable jewels, went as heir-looms, with the landed and funded property, to Mr. John Ryland, the heir-at-law. The under-servants were also considered, and there was a legacy for Nurse Dent. Mrs. Susannah was already in possession of an annuity, bestowed upon her by her indulgent mistress. Last of all, there was some valuable china, and a small collection of books, which my aunt wished to go to her sister-in-law Kendrick, my own mother.

All this she explained to me very clearly; and

her *will*, she informed me, was in a certain private drawer of her own *secrétaire*, which stood in her dressing-room. As I stood, and as she sat in her easy chair, leaning back on her pillows, we could see, through the open door, the *secrétaire* in question, not many yards from the spot where we were; and as she gave me the information, she raised her delicate, wasted hand, and pointed to the place where, in due time, the necessary document would be found. "And as soon as I am dead, Millicent," she added, "let seals be put upon everything, till John Ryland makes his appearance."

I listened, like one in a dream, from which I would fain awake; the knowledge of the provision so kindly made for myself and for my family gave me little satisfaction; I scarcely heeded it, for all the throbbing tendrils of my passionate, undisciplined heart had twined themselves round the faded, sinking form beside me; I cared little about what then seemed to me the sordid cares of the future; I thought only of the time, so near at hand, when I should see that beloved face no more, nor hear the soft low voice—O, so weak and tremulous now!—nor clasp the thin, feverish hand, nor feel the slight fingers twining lovingly with my own. The future was a blank—a void, which I literally *dared* not contemplate; and I turned from it with resolute, systematic avoidance—with a sort of sullen, dogged determination not to anticipate by one hour the misery and the darkness that were coming upon me.

When my aunt had once informed me of all that

concerned my future prospects, she troubled herself about temporal matters no more. She was sometimes sad, and sometimes cheerful; but she was always calm and thankful and patient through suffering, the remembrance of which sickens me even now. Nurse Dent used to read to her a good deal, but principally from the Bible; and the two never seemed tired of going over the same chapters again and again, and then it was I first learned, in some sort, to value and to love the sacred writings. Not for their own sake though—not the blessed truths therein contained; but for the poetical language, and the fine imagery, and the infinite pathos of many of the passages I so frequently heard.

One beautiful evening, I came in from the garden with flowers, wherewith to replenish the large china bowl on my aunt's table. I laid them down on my entrance, and began to sort them, and Nurse Dent, who had complained of headache all day, said that, if I pleased, she would take advantage of her lady's being so much better, and of my being there, to go down into the town on some little errand of her own.

"Go, go, nurse," said Mrs. Ryland; "I shall not want you till bed-time; and you are looking quite poorly for want of a little fresh air; and Millicent will be with me—Millicent leaves me almost as little as you, nurse."

"Miss Kendrick would never be out of the room for five minutes in the day, if she could help it," said nurse; "but I think I will go out this even-

ing, if you can spare me, ma'am; I shall be back again in an hour."

And so we were left alone, for my aunt informed Mrs. Susannah that she did not want her; and, indeed, the Abigail seemed rather to shrink from the companionship of her mistress; "the odour of the sick-room affected her nerves," she told the housekeeper, and Mary said that all the servants declared "that she was but a broken crutch to lean upon in time of need." I was only too thankful to be free of her presence, for I dreaded as well as disliked her; and I believe that my aunt dispensed most willingly with her services, and preferred trivial inconveniences to the burden of her society.

I sat arranging my flowers, and my aunt lay back on her pillows, watching the beautiful sunset light on the hoary Castle towers, and on the grey moors beyond; the whole western heavens were flooded with a golden glory. Presently she said, "Millicent, did you ever see a more beautiful sky? See! the hues brighten and deepen as we watch them; that distant hill might be the Mount of Transfiguration; nay, it might be the gate of the heavenly city itself! And O! Millicent, it brings to my mind the promise—the promise that is so graciously fulfilled in me—'at evening-time it shall be light.'"

I looked up, only half comprehending; and she went on murmuring to herself those touching lines of the *Christian* poet, James Montgomery—

"Stormy and dark hath been my day,
Yet rose the morn Divinely bright—
Dews, birds, and blossoms cheer'd the way.
O for one sweet, one parting ray!—
At evening-time let there be light."

She was silent for a minute or more; her eyes fixed, her lips silently moving in intense supplication; then the shadow passed from her pale brow, and she burst forth:—

"At evening-time *there shall be light*,
For God hath spoken—it must be;
Fear, doubt, and anguish take their flight,
His glory now is ris'n on me;
Mine eyes shall his salvation see—
'Tis evening-time, and there is light."

And as she spoke, there was a brilliancy in her dark eye, a sweetness in her smile, and a flush on her cheek, that restored to her more of the beauty of earlier days than I had ever seen—she looked almost like the Alice Kendrick in the portrait.

"Yes," she continued, shading her face as she spoke, "and I have dwelt in darkness so long, that now the celestial light almost dazzles me; but O, to think it should be vouchsafed to me—to such as I am—to a creature so sinful, so proud, and hard, and selfish, and worldly! What a life mine has been! Talents, station, influence, wealth—all wasted, utterly wasted! Even my fatal gift of beauty has been perverted; in all things I have forgotten my God, and done Him dishonour. But, 'her sins, which are many, are forgiven; for she loved much: *but to whom little is forgiven, the same loveth*

little.' Millicent, do not think my peace comes from a vain confidence; I am not trusting to anything in myself; I am so vile, so worthless, that I can only discard myself as something too base to take into account; and when fears and doubts beset me, and I look back on the past, I just try to put *self* away as worse than nothing, and cling the tighter to my Saviour. None ever perished at His feet, so I will kneel there, more than content to go into heaven together with pardoned publicans and harlots. I have put my trust in Him; therefore I shall not be confounded."

I listened, but I did not comprehend; and how my aunt could class herself with "publicans and harlots," I could not conceive. Even then, by her lips, God was speaking to me; Christ was calling; the blessed Spirit was striving—and I would not hear, I would not be convinced. There are some hearts that melt at the first whisper of love and mercy; some that hold out till the first great sorrow comes to cloud their sunshine: and some that need the extinction not only of sun, but of moon and stars, and the uprooting of all the flowers and fruitage of their mortal life, ere they turn from idols to serve the living and true God. They need the storm and the whirlwind, the midnight darkness and the fiery darts of heaven. And such a heart was mine! Years afterwards I read in God's own Book, "O that thou hadst hearkened to My commandments! then had thy peace been as a river, and thy righteousness as the waves of the

sea." Ah me! why did I go on, seeking rest and joy in the desert, when the milk and honey of the land of promise might have been my own?

But to go back to that calm, never-to-be-forgotten summer evening. The sunset lights faded, and the shadows fell; but there was no darkness: the fair, sleeping earth lay in perpetual summer twilight, and the moon arose, and sat in her silvery beauty on the dusky hill. It was such a night as might have brooded over Eden.

Nurse Dent came back in due time, and my aunt welcomed her appearance, for she was very tired, and wished to be settled for the night. Nurse went down for her lady's supper; but she soon came back, and mixed the wine with the arrowroot, and set down the tray; and, at the same moment, Mrs. Susannah came in with candles. Then I started, for I saw that my aunt's face was strangely changed; it was not so much a pallor, as an ashen gray that had stolen over it, and there was a rigidity in the features that I had never, even in her acutest paroxysms of pain, witnessed before. She looked, however, at the arrowroot, and murmured, "Take it away, nurse; I cannot eat it; I shall want nothing more."

Then nurse, and all of us, saw how it was; the end was come; death had stolen in, with that cool fragrant nightfall. I, who had never witnessed the parting of body and soul, knew instinctively what was going to happen; I knew that the moment had arrived, when all the remedies of earth must prove *unavailing*. Mrs. Susannah fled in dismay from the

scene of dissolution, crying out that she would go and fetch Mr. Rushton herself. Nurse tried to administer a little wine, but it was of no use; my aunt endeavoured to swallow it, but could not; and she said faintly, "Do not try any more, it only disturbs me." Then she asked that candles might be brought, "for I want," she said, "to see Millicent's face again." The candles were burning brightly; it was the dying eyes that were shrouded in the darkness of death: soon she would see that which is hidden from mortal gaze.

I held her hand in mine, and felt it grow colder and colder: all was silent; I could hear the beating of my own heart. At last there was a movement, a quivering of the damp, chill fingers, and the lips opened, and words were spoken once more; I listened, and heard—"My husband! you forgive me *now*! I am coming—O! my little child, your mother is coming!"

Then there came over the dying face a look of childish wonder and childish content, mingled with an aspect of solemn awe and deepest reverence; and we heard her say—

"'Tis evening-time, and *there is light*,'

through Jesus Christ our Lord."

And then we knew that she looked on heaven's own brightness; the spirit had passed to God. The long years of loneliness, of painful reserve, remorse, and self-upbraiding were over; the weariness, the restlessness, and the anguish of pain were all past;

she was safely landed on the shore where sorrow and sickness come never more—*never more!* And, for the moment, I longed wildly, passionately, to be there also.

For I said to myself, in bitterness of spirit, "Why should I wish to live? There is no such thing as happiness on earth; there is no rest but in the grave."

CHAPTER XV.

THE NEW DYNASTY.

There was hurrying to and fro,
Many footsteps on the stair,
Voices shrill and clang of bell,
Wild confusion everywhere.
Who comes hither?—who is here
With gallant grey, and groom and page?
Lo, the heir of these proud halls
Comes to claim his heritage.

AND so it was all over, and I felt as if the world were emptied of every joy. How desolate seemed my chamber when, long after midnight, I sought its seclusion! I threw myself on the bed without undressing, thinking of the year that had passed, and recalling all that had happened since my residence at the Castle House; and then I remembered with a start that it was the anniversary of my miserable return home, after leaving Agenoria House as a "finished" pupil. Yes, just twelve months had elapsed since the crushing blow of my father's insolvency had fallen upon me; and now—now that after months of weariness, and chagrin, and gloom, I had at length found what seemed to me a pure and unmingled joy, in my passionate attachment to my aunt, she was torn away; and I was left a bereft and aimless creature in a desolate world; *for of late my interests and affections had been so*

concentrated in my present home, that nearer and older ties were for the time completely ignored.

Very soon the summer morning broke sweetly over the battlemented Castle towers, and I rose from my bed and looked forth on the wide, green valley that stretched far away beneath the Castle Hill, and on the purpling, swelling moors beyond. One planet yet lingered in the sky—the morning star, with its pale, soft light fading, or rather melting away, in the growing radiance of the red dawn. A few years since I read Fouqué's well-known lines,—

“Seest thou the Eastern dawn?
Hear'st thou in the red morn
The angels' song?
O, lift thy drooping head,
Thou who, in gloom and dread,
Hast lain so long.

Death comes to set thee free,
O, meet him cheerily,
As thy true friend;
And all thy fears shall cease,
And, in eternal peace,
Thy penance end.”

And as I read the verses, in the beautiful legend of “Sintram,” I thought of that “red morn” when, with crushed hope, and heart well-nigh broken, I watched, with eyes too sad for tears, the pale morning star melting into the pure and radiant sunshine.

At sunset, she whom I so deplored still lingered in the flesh, worn with pain and with long years of a fruitless penance of remorse and self-reproach. *Now, at sunrise, the conflict was over; by the*

mercy of God in Jesus Christ, through the solemn gates of death she had entered into "eternal peace." I stood by the open window till the last shades of night had vanished, and the sunlight streamed brightly on the old grey towers, and the quiet valley and the shining river below—how the brilliancy of that sweet summer morning mocked my aching heart! Then I thought I would go back to the chamber of death; there would be no watchers there, and I would see the beloved face that would so soon be hidden from my gaze. So I stepped out in the corridor; all was silent as the grave, the household was wrapped in peaceful slumber; only I, too new and too deep a mourner for sleep, kept vigil in the early morning.

I was soon in my aunt's chamber, where all the solemn stillness of the hour seemed centred. It scarcely looked the same; all the books were put away, the confusion of the preceding night had given place to a scrupulous order and a cold formality that chilled my very heart, and the bed by which I had spent so many hours was covered with a snow-white sheet, that concealed something so still, and straight, and rigid, that as I gazed my blood curdled in my veins, and a strange and indescribable awe almost overpowered me.

But that weakness soon passed, when with trembling hand I turned back the sheet, and looked on the placid features of the dead! The same dear face that twelve hours before had smiled lovingly on mine, the same pale, serene features, but wearing

a peaceful beauty that I had never seen before. The white hands were folded on the breast, the dark hair was smoothly braided over the marble brow, and the long lashes swept the pure ivory of the wasted cheek—it was death, arrayed in his fairest robes, his loveliest guise. I bent down to kiss the lips that had kissed mine so tenderly last night—O! the anguish of kissing beloved lips, that for the first time give back no response! We know then that all is over, death becomes a bitter reality, and we feel that between us and the departed intervenes the dreary darkness of the grave. It is too soon for the comfort that comes afterwards, the strong faith that, holding to its heart the instinct of love's immortality, cries with the German poet—

“Soul-like were those days of yore;
Let us walk in soul once more.”

The icy unconsciousness of those lips struck my very soul, and the tears that had refused to flow broke out in floods. All the pent-up feeling of hours rushed out in cries, and tears, and sobs; and I buried my head in my hands, and wept as if I would pour out life itself in those torrents of passionate unavailing anguish. I know not how long I knelt by that quiet couch; but gradually the storm of sorrow wore itself out, and I wept on quietly, but with an ever-deepening sense of my loss, till I was startled by something that was *not exactly* a movement, but rather a manifestation

of some kind of life, very near at hand. I sprang up and gazed eagerly towards the still form, but all was calm there; not a fold of the sheet was stirred, and the white fingers kept their rigid clasp on the unheaving bosom. I looked round the room, but I was quite alone; and no one could have entered, for I had drawn the bolt on the inside, that I might not be interrupted. Nevertheless, I was quite sure that somebody or something had stirred, though now all was quiet again, and the presence of death reigned undisturbed in the silent room. I determined to go into the dressing-room, the door of which was slightly ajar; and, accordingly, after a moment's thought, I passed noiselessly and swiftly into the adjoining chamber. And there was Mrs. Susannah; she sat, or rather crouched, all huddled up, in a corner of a sofa; her face was covered with her apron, and she wore the same dress as on the preceding evening—like myself, she had not been regularly to bed.

She was not asleep, and when she heard my voice she looked up, like one terrified out of her senses, and burst into a low hysterical wail. Her face was as white, and nearly as rigid, as the one in the other room. I asked her, for want of knowing exactly what to say to her, "why she stayed there." Then she flushed up, and gave me one of her wrathful looks; only she seemed to shrink from me now, almost as much as I instinctively shrank from her; and she replied, "that she could not go to bed, and she had wanted to come and look at her

dear mistress again, while all was quiet, and before there was any change;" and, hearing that I was coming, she had retreated into the dressing-room, in order not to disturb me.

I thanked her for her consideration; but how that common, but most painful sentence, "before there is any change," thrilled through and through me!—it seemed to bring before me death in all its horror, and loathsomeness, and humiliation. She rose directly afterwards, and went away, recommending me, not disrespectfully, to go to bed, and try to get a little sleep. I remembered, afterwards, that she seemed to shrink away from me, as, in passing, her dress touched mine; and that, as she left the room, she gave me a hurried glance, half-frightened, I fancied, and half-defiant; then her eyes dropped before mine, and she turned whiter than ever, and I noticed her step falter as she crossed the bed-room, without one look towards the white-robed bed, where the sweet, quiet face still lay uncovered, in its peaceful, solemn rest.

I remarked, but I did not reflect upon, the singularity of her behaviour; and feeling now thoroughly exhausted, I once more kissed the cold lips, and, reverently replacing the sheet, went away to my own room, where I soon slept, and awakened not till the morning was verging upon mid-day, and Nurse Dent came to bring me my breakfast, and advised me not to get up till towards evening. But my dreams had reminded me of something that must *be attended to*; I remembered that my aunt had

desired everything to be sealed up till the arrival of Mr. John Ryland; and it was necessary also that that gentleman should be formally apprised of the demise of his relative; so I hastily swallowed my breakfast, and sent a message to Mr. Rushton, begging him to come to me without delay.

He presented himself as soon as I was ready to receive him, and he undertook to do for me all that was requisite. He engaged to write to Mr. John Ryland before post-time; and he at once affixed his own seal to the *secrétaire*, the family jewel-casket, and the great, heavy, oaken plate-chest, and other repositories of letters, documents, or valuable property. He also observed that Mr. Fennimore, my aunt's solicitor, who lived at York, ought to be written to, as he would certainly arrange to meet Mr. John Ryland's lawyer, at the opening of the will. I agreed with him, and this also he kindly took in charge.

He was ready to go, when he suddenly stopped, and said, "Ah, dear, I had almost forgotten Mrs. Rushton's message. My dear Miss Kendrick, this house is a mournful place for you to be alone in; my wife hopes you will come and stay with us, till you have settled your plans, or, indeed, as long as ever you please. Besides, I am not sure that you will find it pleasant, being here with the John Rylands: unless they are greatly altered, they are far from agreeable people, and they have it in their power to make your position here extremely awkward. Come to us; your interests can be attended to

while you are in my house as easily as if you remained here; you may count upon Mr. Fennimore and myself in any and every emergency."

I thanked Mr. Rushton gratefully; but for the present I could not accept his kind and considerate offer. I could not go before the funeral; I must watch, till the last, all that remained of my lost treasure. And, further, I had learned to love the great, dreary Castle House, and I felt like an exile, when I contemplated the necessity of speedily quitting it for ever. I would not anticipate by one hour the period of my unavoidable banishment.

And so the sad days passed away, and every hour brought nearer that which I dreaded as the consummation of my misery—the hour when the beloved form would be borne away and laid to moulder in the silent dust. While I could steal into that quiet chamber, and shut myself in, and gaze upon the beautiful, calm, dead face, I felt that she was not quite gone—something yet was left me—for a little while, for a very little while! When I was absent from that room, which was never for any length of time at once, I sat silently in my own apartment, brooding over my desolation, and sometimes passionately crying on the dead to come back again once more; or else I wandered, like a restless ghost, up and down the long passages, and from room to room, now contemplating the painting in the drawing-room—the beautiful, queen-like Alice Kendrick of earlier days—now gazing on the sad, sweet face of the portrait in the dining-room.

Husband and wife, long severed—severed in life, as in death. They were united now!

I was roused from this dreary, dream-like existence on the evening of the fourth day. I was sitting in the drawing-room, with a book in my hand, the subject of which I did not even know, when I heard a great disturbance in the house, a slamming of doors, a calling, a ringing of bells, that seemed, after the long, death-like stillness, perfectly horrible. I was rising to go down-stairs to see what could be the cause of this unseemly tumult, when the drawing-room door was thrown wide open, and a portly lady, all flounces and fur-belows, advanced consequentially to the seat of honour—my aunt's special chair, which was standing in its usual place by one of the occasional tables, within a pleasant distance of the now-empty fireplace and one of the windows.

I stood up, all aghast at this unexpected apparition: I was prepared for the advent of Mr. John Ryland, but who might this broad-fronted matron be? A moment's thought suggested that she was probably the wedded wife of Mr. John Ryland, and the actual mistress of the Castle House. And so indeed she was.

"Do I speak to Miss Kendrick?" said the stately lady, shaking out the voluminous folds of a pink *chine* silk dress with one hand, and stroking down a profusion of fiery red ringlets with the other; her bonnet was pink also—glowing, rosy pink—and that did not harmonize with the flaming curls, and the *peach-blossom* gloves and mantle.

I replied that I was Millicent Kendrick; "Mrs. Ryland's niece," I added.

"Yes, I understand," said the lady complacently; "*the late* Mrs. Ryland's niece, and her companion. Really, John and I were quite amazed to hear that she thought it necessary to hire a companion; we thought she and Mrs. Susannah would have gone on together in the old way to the end of the chapter. But it is quite as well you are here, child. I dare say you can tell me where some things are, better than the waiting-woman could; and, in the meantime, I will thank you to order tea *immediately*; and let us have some ham, and tell them to boil a few eggs, and of course there is a cold joint in the house, and very likely a chicken or two, and plenty of preserves. Go at once; John and I are dreadfully tired and hungry."

I did go, wondering whether I was really awake or dreaming some fantastic dream, from which in due time I should happily be roused. I went downstairs to give the orders in person, and in the hall and about the passages I encountered a swarm of strange servants, some English, and some foreign, who eyed me with insolent curiosity. In the housekeeper's room, all was confusion and dismay; cook was wringing her hands, for Mr. Ryland's own man had ordered coffee and omelets for four in the butler's room, and Mrs. Ryland's own maid had desired to be shown forthwith to her mistress's "private apartments." We had had a bed aired for Mr. *Ryland*; but we had never anticipated his wife's

arrival, and were totally unprepared for the invasion of a whole crew of domestics. Mary suggested that some of them should be accommodated in the south wing, and Thomas actually asked them "whether they minded sleeping in haunted rooms, because there was but very few rooms in that house as wasn't haunted?" A piece of information that considerably damped the ardour of the invading party; their objectionable hilarity was straightway and effectually quelled; for your pert domestic is invariably cowed at a hint of the supernatural.

I delivered the new mistress's message to the housekeeper, and then I was going to my own room, when I heard Mrs. John's voice on the great landing, shrieking, "Miss Kendrick! Miss Kendrick! why don't you come back? Where is my maid? Where is my page? Where are all my people? Dear me! it is very strange one cannot be attended to, in one's own house!"

"Come now, Maria Antoinetta! You can't have everything at once," said another voice of unutterable gruffness; "do keep still a bit! just take off your bonnet, and wait till tea comes up. I dare say the young wom—I mean the young lady has ordered it."

I said that I had; and I offered to show Mrs. John to the room which had been prepared for her husband. There was no reason why it should not serve her turn also, for it was spacious, and the bed was roomy enough to accommodate a small family. It was easy to bring in toilet appa-

ratus, and a cheval-glass, and an extra lounging chair.

But Mrs. John drew back in displeasure: "You don't mean to say you've put me in this—such a room as this! I wonder at you, Miss—Miss what's your name."

I pleaded our want of notice, and remarked, also, that most of the rooms were very similar. "Nonsense!" retorted Mrs. John; "I suppose you don't sleep in such an unearthly place; why, there's old tapestry on the walls. Do you think I never read about secret doors and passages? I wouldn't sleep here for any money!"

I showed her several other rooms, and, at her special request, my own; but none of them pleased her better than the one already prepared, and so at last she concluded to take up her abode there, for that night at least; remarking that, as the nights were at the shortest, it would be easy to keep several candles burning till broad daylight. As we were returning to the drawing-room, she caught a glimpse of the door leading into the south wing, and demanded to know to what part of the house it gave access. I explained, and her teeth absolutely chattered, when she found that she must pass the dreaded portal on her way bedwards. Then she adjured me solemnly to tell her whether, during my residence in the Castle House, I had ever seen "*anything*."

As I supposed she referred to anything supernatural, I gravely assured her that I had never

once seen or heard anything ghostly during the year I had spent with my aunt. This seemed in some measure to quiet her fears, and she went to tea, and consumed so much food, both solids and liquids, that I no longer wondered at her exceeding corpulence. After tea, I showed Mr. John Ryland the seals upon the property, and he decided that everything should remain as it was till the funeral was over. He behaved very civilly to me; altogether, he was vastly superior to his wife; he was very good-looking, and had the air of a gentleman; and yet I found it very difficult to believe that he was the brother of the Mr. Ryland whose portrait I had so frequently contemplated, and with whose pathetic history I was so intimately acquainted.

About one o'clock in the morning, we were roused by piercing screams from the chamber of Mr. and Mrs. John Ryland. Mrs. John had seen a ghost! It had placed its death-cold hand on her stomach, and held her down by supernatural force! The servants were pale with terror; Mr. John looked scared. I, remembering her stupendous supper-tea, opined that she had been visited by nightmare.

CHAPTER XVI.

THE WILL.

I dream no more—the vision flies away,
And Disappointment
There fell my hopes—I lost my all in this,
My cherished all of visionary bliss.
Now Hope farewell—farewell, all joys below;
Now welcome Sorrow, and now welcome Woe.

Fragment by H. KIRKE WHITE.

MR. JOHN RYLAND, of course, took upon himself the entire arrangement of the funeral; everything was ordered on a scale of princely magnificence, and the interment was to take place at an ancient village church about three miles out of the town, where, for many generations, the elder branch of the Ryland family had found their last resting-place. There lay Sampson Ryland, and his little daughter, side by side; and there would lie, till the morning of the resurrection, the wife and mother, so long estranged, so well beloved.

On the evening before the funeral, Mr. Fennimore, my aunt's lawyer, arrived from York. He asked for me, and he was shown into the dining-room, where I was sitting alone, after having visited for the last time the chamber of death. He was very kind and polite, and he assured me that, though he had travelled to Luncester principally for the purpose of representing my interests, he had no idea *that his services would be actually required; for*

the will, which he had drawn up under my aunt's direction, was so simple and defined, and, as he was certain, so legally correct, that it was impossible for any one in their senses to dispute any one of the clauses pertaining thereto. He concluded by saying, "Am I right in supposing you know where the will is to be found, Miss Kendrick?"

"Yes," I replied; "it is in the *secrétaire*, in my aunt's dressing-room; she always kept her private papers there."

"Have you actually seen it there?"

"No, my aunt told me about ten days before her death, where the will would be found; and she desired me to see that seals were affixed to the *secrétaire* immediately after her decease."

"And, of course, this injunction was obeyed?"

"My dear aunt died late in the evening; I did not rise next day till near upon noon; then I sent for Mr. Rushton, and he came and affixed his own seal upon every box and drawer that was supposed to contain documents and valuables."

"The seals ought to have been affixed the same night; however, it is of little consequence: the will is entirely in your favour, and you were the only person who had access to the *secrétaire*."

"Yes, no one else could touch anything; my aunt's keys were given into my keeping that very morning, and I have them still. I offered them to Mr. John Ryland, but he objected to receive them, saying that, as the seals were to remain unbroken till to-morrow, the keys would be quite useless."

"Very well, it is all straightforward enough; I dare say Mr. Easton has told you that he and the late Mr. Broadway witnessed the will."

"Yes, he did tell me so: I dare say it will be quite right."

"I cannot doubt it: for I took special care that there should be no ground of litigation. Yes, I took special care, for the John Rylands, having always entertained a—very ridiculous jealousy of the late Mrs. Ryland and her family, would be sure to dispute anything that was not thoroughly and glaringly self-evident. And now I will wish you good evening; I sleep at Mr. Easton's—we shall both be with you in the morning."

He went away, to my infinite relief, for all this talk about business seemed to me heartless, and almost profane. I had not learned, then, to take up duties as they came, without reference to time, or place, or my own feelings. I had learned very little of real, practical life: but the world's hardest lessons were awaiting me.

The next morning came, and the funeral train set out for Kirkby-Hutton, where the interment was to take place. Mrs. John Ryland kept her own room, and so did I: only Nurse Dent came to me sometimes with a word of sympathy and comfort. There I sat, in the darkened room, my hands crossed listlessly on my new black dress, my heart overburdened with dull, hopeless grief, and my eyes heavy with tears, that refused to fall. Once nurse came in, and seeing my dry eyes and my miserable counte-

nance, proposed that we should read the Burial Service together. I made no objection; and I leaned back wearily in my chair, while she read aloud the beautiful lessons from the 15th of 1st Corinthians; and her voice sounded dreamy and afar off as she uttered, "Blessed are the dead that die in the Lord."

After a while I heard the mourning-coaches come back again, and then I knew that she whom I loved was left in her cold grave, under the stones of the mouldering church of Kirkby-Hutton. Nurse brought me some cold meat and bread, and some wine; and, to please her, I tried to make something of a repast. About three o'clock I was summoned to the reading of the will.

When I reached the great landing I met Mr. Rushton waiting to lead me into the dressing-room, where I found Mr. and Mrs. John Ryland, and their lawyer, Mr. Reynell; also Mr. Fennimore, and the Rev. Mr. Broadway.

How well I remember it all! To the right of the *secrétaire* sat Mr. John, looking alternately complacent and dolorous, and by his side, arrayed in the deepest sables, was his wife, with her broad-hemmed handkerchief pressed tightly against her face; her scarlet hair was set out in a multitude of little crimp, wiry curls, and the unoccupied hand rested on an elegant little smelling-bottle, with gold and jewelled top. In one corner sat the clergyman, looking stolid and satisfied, as indeed he was, for he had just lunched, and the Castle House

port was second to none in the country—a circumstance which the Rev. John Broadway appreciated more thoroughly than consistently. Near him was Mr. Rushton; and not far from the window, Mr. Reynell—a little dapper man, with grey hair, and eyes that flashed like blue lightning, when he took off his green spectacles.

He was the first to speak—"I think now we are all assembled, and may proceed to business. Mr. Rushton, will you examine the seals?" What a harsh, thin voice the little man had! It made me think of the bass notes of the old clavichord in the south wing.

Mr. Rushton assented, and, coming forward, he proceeded to a due examination of the seals—they were exactly as he had left them. Then Mr. Fennimore was desired to break them, and to open the *secrétaire*, and unfold and read aloud the will. He complied, and drew out the drawer which I had indicated, as being the repository of my aunt's special papers; it was not there! Another and another drawer was examined, a secret recess was opened and its contents brought out; there was nothing in it but old yellow letters; no will was to be seen. Mr. Fennimore and Mr. Rushton looked confounded: I felt infinitely puzzled, and in some measure annoyed.

"There is no will here," said Mr. Fennimore, turning to me. "Are you sure, Miss Kendrick, that your aunt decidedly mentioned the *secrétaire*?"

"Quite sure," I replied: "we sat in the other

room, opposite that door, which was open at the time, and my aunt pointed to the *secrétaire* as she spoke. Afterwards she mentioned the will, once, and only once, and that was to say that it was in the middle drawer on the right-hand side, together with the copy of a certain lease."

"The copy of lease is there safe enough," said Mr. Fennimore, who held in his hands the drawer in question; "but there is no will—where can it be, think you, Miss Kendrick?"

I had no idea, for I was perfectly bewildered; I was certain that I had been told that it was contained in that identical drawer, and the keys were in my dear aunt's possession till the morning of the day of her death, and then they passed into mine, and I had never lost sight of them from that hour to the present moment; moreover, the seals were intact, and no one besides myself knew where the will was deposited, till I communicated the fact to Mr. John Ryland. Mrs. John could now dispense with her imposing pocket handkerchief, and she was watching the lawyers and Mr. Rushton with the keenest interest as they turned over again and again every paper that the drawers and pigeon-holes contained. At length, when the gentlemen, fairly baffled, desisted from their search, she broke out triumphantly, "There is no will, then? I thought not!"

"Pardon me," returned Mr. Fennimore; "there certainly is a will, for I drew it up myself, and I have a copy at this moment in my pocket. At the

request of my deceased client, I avoided legal technicalities, and stated the matter in plain English, such as a child might understand. The copy bears date April 20th—not quite ten weeks ago, you perceive; and from certain savings of her own, Mrs. Alice Ryland, relict of Sampson Ryland, Esq., of the Castle House, Lunechester, bequeaths to her niece, Millicent, eldest daughter of her only brother, Henry Kendrick, formerly of Ferndown, near Radenham, and now of Chetwode-street, London, certain properties in shares and Bank stock, to the amount of £300 per annum. Also to Mr. Henry Kendrick a legacy of £1,000; and to his younger daughters, Rose and Susan, and to his eldest son, Harry Percival, legacies of £500 each. There is also some china to Mrs. Kendrick; and specified articles of plate and jewellery to Miss Kendrick. Then follow bequests to the servants, and £100, duty free, to Mrs. Dent, commonly called Nurse Dent, of 13, Friar's-lane, Lunechester."

As Mr. Fennimore concluded, he handed the copy of the missing will to Mr. John Ryland, who read it attentively, his wife looking over as he did so.

"I see how it is," said Mrs. John, when she had finished; "Mrs. Ryland's inclinations prompted her to execute a will in favour of her own relations; but, as she drew near her end, conscience rebuked her for the estrangement of property, in which she only enjoyed a life interest, and she destroyed the will, and very wisely kept her own counsel."

"I am sure she did not," I replied, flushing all over with anger. "She told me herself that the real property must all go back to the Ryland family; but as she had lived within her income during the whole term of her widowhood, she had been able to save a considerable sum; and this money, the fruit of her self-denial—for she might have spent every farthing, and have left the estate involved, had she been so disposed—she always intended to leave to her only brother and his family; and undoubtedly it was her own, to do with as she pleased and to bequeath to whomsoever she chose."

"Legally *yes*," said Mrs. John; "morally, *no*. But whatever Mrs. Sampson Ryland's *intentions* may have been, there is *no will*; and I suppose no one imagines that *intentions* are of any weight in a court of law."

"Certainly not in *a court of law*, madam," said Mr. Fennimore, with grave emphasis; "but there is, you know, another court of higher appeal, where such evident and well-attested intentions weigh down the scale, at the premises of the case."

"Indeed, sir," replied Mrs. John, "and what court may that be?"

"The court where the Judge of all the earth presides, madam; the tribunal at whose bar will be made many an appeal, rejected here, and put aside for want of strictly legal evidence."

Mrs. John coloured, and looked daggers at the old gentleman. Mr. Reynell barely suppressed a sneer. Mr. John Ryland was evidently uncomfortable.

"Who are the witnesses of this will, which does not seem to be forthcoming?" asked Mr. Reynell.

"They are before you, sir," returned Mr. Fennimore: "Mr. Rushton, the medical attendant and old friend of my late client, and the Rev. John Broadway, vicar of the parish of St. Beetha, Luncheonster."

Mr. Broadway now came forward:—"Yes, sir; yes. I here bear witness, that on the 20th of April, in this present year of grace, I attested, as also did Mr. Rushton, in my presence, the last will and testament of the late Mrs. Alice Ryland."

"I bear witness also," said Mr. Rushton; "I declare, that in conjunction with the vicar of this parish, I did, on the 20th of April, attest the document in question; and I, moreover, make statement, which I am ready to repeat upon oath, that eight days before Mrs. Ryland's death, I being alone with her at the time, she said to me:—'I have told my niece Millicent that I have provided for her, and I wish to tell you what I have already told her, that my will is in the right hand middle drawer of my private *secrétaire*, in my dressing-room. There is nothing in that drawer but the will, and a copy of the lease of the Water Meadows. The ivory handle of the drawer has been broken off, and a common brass knob substituted.'"

We all looked: there was the brass knob on the one drawer, and ivory handles on all the others—there was the copy of the lease in question—but no will whatever.

"All this proves, sir, that there *has been* a will," said Mr. Reynell; "but it in no wise substantiates the fact of its existence at this present moment."

"I believe," I said quietly, "that the will is either stolen or destroyed."

"Yes, destroyed, exactly," interposed Mrs. John; "just what I said; Mrs. Ryland repented of what she had done, and *destroyed* the will; it was not likely she would speak of it, least of all to the person most concerned."

"I am certain," I replied, "that my aunt never dreamed of destroying it. My belief is that it has been stolen from the *secrétaire* since her death; it must have been abstracted between twelve o'clock on last Thursday night, and twelve o'clock on the following Friday morning, when Mr. Rushton affixed his seals in the presence of the housekeeper, my aunt's waiting-woman, and myself."

"Let the women be called," said both the lawyers.

"By all means summon the women," chimed in the clergyman, taking a terrific pinch of snuff, that titillated my nostrils at three yards' distance. The housekeeper and Mrs. Susannah soon made their appearance, but neither of them could throw any light upon the subject: Nurse Dent was next interrogated, but she had nothing to say that could tend to clear up the matter. Then it was asked who had been in the room during the time when the *secrétaire* was not sealed up.

Only myself and Mrs. Susannah appeared to have set foot in it; and the waiting-woman seemed terribly

annoyed at being thus, in some sort, compromised; but she came, as she said, "to have another look at her dear dead mistress, that she had served for years and years, and, hearing Miss Kendrick coming, she had retreated to the dressing-room, where she remained some time, the outer door being locked, and the key taken away."

"How did you know Miss Kendrick was coming?" asked Mr. Fennimore; "her light step would never sound upon the thick carpet in the corridor."

"I heard her cough," replied Mrs. Susannah; "she coughed twice as she came towards the room."

I thought a little, and I remembered that I had coughed, and tried to suppress it from force of habit, as I should have done, had my aunt been lying asleep in the chamber. So far, then, she spoke accurately.

"What did you do in the dressing-room?" asked Mr. Fennimore.

"Nothing," replied Mrs. Susannah, angrily; "do you suppose *I* went to the *secrétaire*? Why, Miss Kendrick heard me stir the first time I moved; besides, she says the keys were never out of her own pocket."

"It is true," I interposed; "they were never out of my pocket till I went to bed, and then they were under my pillow, and I held them in my hand."

"Do you think your mistress burnt the will?" asked Mr. Reynell.

"Really, sir, I can't say," was the reply; "I

was not very much about my mistress at the last—long and faithful services are not always appreciated. Miss Kendrick and Mrs. Dent had it pretty well their own way. And whether my mistress repented, and made away with the will, I am sure I can't say: perhaps she did; perhaps she didn't."

"She could not have *burnt* it," I said; "for there has been no fire in either of these rooms for weeks."

"But she might have lighted it at a candle," returned Mrs. Susannah; "she might have set it alight, and then thrown it in the grate, or in the fender; and there *was* burnt paper in the grate, Miss Kendrick, for I gathered it up myself."

"There might have been," I replied; "but paper is not parchment; and I believe I burnt a note myself one night, and threw it on the hearth; I think I remember it."

Nurse Dent remarked that Mrs. Ryland was too weak to open the *secrétaire* without assistance; and she was never left alone for many minutes together—her destruction of the will seemed to be a thorough impossibility.

"I have know people, under dying circumstances, perform wonderful feats," said Mr. Reynell; "it is astonishing how the power of the will triumphs, for the moment, over the extremity of bodily weakness; and if Mrs. Ryland were left alone for five minutes, she might have executed her purpose as completely as in five hours."

"There is no will, however!" said Mrs. John

again; and her husband responded—"No, no will, certainly; the inheritance is undividedly my own—that is, ours."

"And can you, already the possessor of a large fortune, and now inheriting many thousands, grudge this child her pitiful three hundred a-year?" said Mr. Fennimore.

"The girl is nothing to us," said Mrs. John, answering for her husband; "Alice Ryland brought nothing into the family, and it is just that she should not, through her relations, carry anything out. Justice is justice, and right is right, all the world over."

As we seemed to be degenerating into altercation, Mr. Rushton proposed that the present meeting should be dissolved by mutual consent, and that a strict search should be instituted, in every place where it was possible that the missing document might be mislaid or secreted, and that, till that was done, matters should remain in abeyance.

To this alternative, which was indeed the only one remaining to us, we all agreed, and the search began, and was carried on most rigidly and strenuously for the remainder of that day, and for the greater part of the next; but no will made its appearance. I knew it would not, for that it had been in the secretary, and thence feloniously abstracted, I had no doubt; but how, when, or by whom, remained a mystery; though, if I had any definite suspicions, they all rested on the fact of my finding Mrs. Susannah in the dressing-room early on the Friday morning, before the seals were affixed.

Finally, Mrs. John came and told me that the search was in vain; and she behaved so rudely, and spoke so contemptuously of my aunt, and I resented her manner so warmly, that we came to high words; that is to say, she indulged in invective, and gave way to passion, till her complexion was as ruddy as her ringlets; and I was sarcastic and bitter, and more than her match in caustic and trenchant rejoinder. In conclusion, she gave me no very delicate hint, that the sooner I relieved the Castle House of my presence, the more agreeable it would be. I had already packed up many of my things, that I might be ready for such an emergency, and I answered that my arrangements would soon be concluded, and as Mrs. Rushton had kindly invited me to her house, I would, if she pleased, remove myself and my belongings that very evening. She replied, that she really thought that for all parties it would be the best and pleasantest course to pursue; and then, remarking that she would hinder me no longer, she went away, leaving me nearly wild with grief and indignation.

When I was left alone, I wept bitterly.

CHAPTER XVII.

"BIDE AWHILE."

Worn out—the heart seems like a ruined altar:
Where are the friends, and where the faith of yore?
My eyes grow dim with tears—my footsteps falter—
Thinking of those whom I can love no more.

We change, and others change; while recollection
Would fain renew what it can but recall:
Dark are life's dreams, and weary its affection,
And cold its hopes—and yet, I felt them all.

L. E. L.

I soon, however, dried my tears, and rang for Nurse Dent to help me finish my packing. Then I went through all the rooms to take a last farewell; and as I did not wish to encounter the strange servants below, I bade nurse desire those who had belonged to my aunt's household to come to my room in order to say good-bye. They soon came, the housekeeper and the housemaids, and the little Cumbrian kitchen-maid, and Thomas; and they all wished me prosperity, and said how sorry they were to lose me; and Mary, with many tears, besought me to take her into my own service, promising all imaginable diligence and fidelity, and holding wages in something like sovereign contempt. I gave each one a little present, and told them if they needed testimonials, in hiring themselves anew, they might apply to me, through Mr. Rushton, who would

always know my address; and they thanked me, and I shook hands with them all, and we parted.

It was a hard task to pay my last visit to the chamber that had been my aunt's, to see its deserted aspect, its vacant bed and invalid's chair; and to stand once more in the dressing-room, where so much of moment had occurred on the previous day. I felt as though every article of furniture were a living friend, to whom I must bid an eternal farewell; and the fear only of meeting Mrs. John Ryland restrained the floods of tears that rushed to my eyelids, when, after lingering to the last moment, I stood at the door, taking my last fond view of the scene that had grown so dear and so sacred to my heart. For, looking at that empty chair, I might well have exclaimed—

“’Twas there the blessed one, and there she died;
And memory flows with lava-tide.”

But the evening lights were fading, and I went back to my own room, to bid that a last farewell. As I passed the closed portal of the south wing, I thought of the desolate chambers within, and almost longed to enter them once more; but it could not be; the key was now in Mr. John Ryland's possession, and I expected every moment to hear Mr. Rushton's carriage drive up to the door. When I reached my own room, I was surprised, and not at all pleased, to see Mrs. Susannah there, evidently awaiting my appearance, and desirous of making some communication.

“*I thought you were going away without wish-*

ing me good-bye, Miss Kendrick," she said, in a strange, hesitating tone, "and I wanted to say something."

"Well?" I returned, feeling extremely nervous.

"It is only this, Miss Kendrick:—I am very sorry about your money—about the will being lost, I mean. Though you and I never were very good friends—never took to each other—I don't like to see my dear mistress's own niece going out, or rather driven out, of the house where she has been welcome so long, without a penny of the little fortune that was meant for her; and so, Miss Kendrick, if you will only take this till better times come, and you get your own property, I should feel very much relieved, and really grateful to you."

I looked to see what "*this*" might be, as she gave it into my hand. What was my astonishment to behold a little bundle of £10 Bank of England notes, six or seven at least, if not more! "No, indeed!" I replied, "I cannot do anything of the sort; it is very good of you, Mrs. Susannah, and I shall always remember it; but indeed I cannot take advantage of your kindness." And as I spoke, I laid down the notes, very much, I am afraid, as if they had burnt my fingers.

She changed countenance, and looked disappointed—nay, extremely distressed; and she began to press them upon me with a strange incoherent eloquence, seemingly determined to force me to accept them. In vain I declared that I would not, and could not, take money that was not fairly my own; and as to

accepting it as a loan, to be paid back when the will was found, or my claims in some way established, it was out of the question; I did not look forward to so fortunate a termination of my difficulties, and the burden of a debt would only increase my trouble.

She interrupted me eagerly by declaring that she had never thought of proffering the money as a loan, until I refused it as a free gift; but if I would condescend to borrow it, I should have it for any length of time, free of interest, and without an acknowledgment.

Of course I steadily refused; it could not be; and certainly Mrs. Susannah was about the last person to whom I should have chosen to put myself under pecuniary obligations. At last, seeing that I was not to be moved, she half desisted, praying me, however, to the final moment of my departure, "to think better of it." I was quite thankful when I heard Mr. Rushton's voice in the hall, and knew that I was fairly released from her importunities. I turned round to say good-bye to Mrs. Susannah; she was standing by the window, apparently lost in thought, and deeply pained and mortified at my rejection of her generosity. I put out my hand, and went through the ordinary forms of leave-taking, and something prompted me to say in conclusion, "God bless you, Mrs. Susannah." I do not think I meant anything; it was a valedictory form of speech, with which I was familiar, and at the moment I felt kindly towards this singular woman, this *compound* of rare friendship and malicious

enmity, who had just given me a proof that, at the present time, the friendship very largely predominated. But she drew back, turned lividly pale, and shrank up, as if I had pronounced, not a thoughtless blessing, but a withering curse. I gazed in astonishment at the convulsive working of her features, and the spasmodic motion of the muscles of her throat; but while I looked and was preparing to inquire the cause of her inexplicable emotion, she ran past me, and I saw her no more. I was so astounded at this singular behaviour, that I left my room without one last lingering glance; and it was not till I stood at the foot of the stairs, that I remembered that I was leaving, probably for ever, the home I had trusted might be mine till I left it for an establishment of my own. In crossing the hall, however, I turned back, bidding a mute, almost agonized farewell to the dark carved ceiling, the richly-coloured windows, and the massive balustrades of the grand staircase. In just such a light, and at nearly the same hour of the evening, had I first seen them—how differently I regarded them then and now! I was just settled in the carriage, and Mr. Rushton was tightening the rein, when Mr. John Ryland came out of the house, and stood for a minute or two on the carriage-step, pouring out a rapid, incoherent harangue, in which he seemed to be apologizing for his wife, and also justifying her conduct, and paying me various irrational compliments on his own account. He went on, till Mr. Rushton, tired out of all

patience, muttered something about the ponies standing, and, jerking the rein, set off at full gallop.

"Confound the fellow!" exclaimed my companion, when we slackened pace, at the top of the steep Castle Hill; "is he a fool, or a rogue?" A question involving so many perplexities that I declined answering it. "Ah," sighed Mr. Rushton, presently, "if I had but been at home that night when I was sent for, when that old cat of a Mrs. Susannah came like a wild creature to fetch me, I should have sealed everything up before I left the room; but, you see, I was four miles off, over the moors yonder. I was sent for in a hurry, and I could not get back till morning; and then Mrs. Rushton, seeing how tired I was, forebore to mention what had occurred with you in my absence, lest I should make it my business to go straight over to the Castle House, instead of going to bed. There was no other message or inquiry, and so I did go to bed, nothing loth, for I had been up for two nights; and, as no urgent case presented itself, I slept soundly till just before you sent for me."

Then I told Mr. Rushton what had passed between myself and Mrs. Susannah; and he agreed with me that the conduct of this extraordinary woman was incomprehensible to the last degree. "I really do not see how she could have got at the will," he added; "for you had the keys, and the locks were certainly unhampered, which could not have been the case if a strange key had been introduced; for they are of very peculiar and difficult

construction, and could never be picked, save by a thoroughly practised hand, and by means of such rare implements as I am sure Lunechester has never seen. But if there were any possibility of her guilt in this matter, I should say, her conscience being too much for her, she desired to make you some slight reparation. What say you?"

"Such an idea never crossed my mind," I replied. "I only thought she was seized with a sudden impulse of benevolence towards her late mistress's niece, whom she believed to be, in some mysterious way, defrauded of her rights. She is, you know, a most eccentric, and a very impulsive creature; but I feel quite sure she poisoned my kitten."

"Eh, what's that? poisoned your kitten, do you say?"

"Yes, my little white kitten that Mrs. Rushton gave me." And I related to him the manner of her death. He shrugged his shoulders, remarking that there was nothing on earth so odious and so dangerous as a spiteful, jealous waiting-woman, who presumed on her long services; and I might congratulate myself she had not thought of poisoning me, instead of my little cat.

By this time we had reached Mr. Rushton's house, and Mrs. Rushton was standing in her little front garden awaiting our arrival. "Go in, old woman, you will have rheumatism again, the dews are falling," said the doctor, as his wife took me into her motherly arms, and bestowed upon me such caresses as she might have given to her own daughter.

We went into the house, a very cottage after the great, rambling mansion that had been my home so long; but so comfortable, so pretty, with its airy muslin curtains, and its gay carpets, and its wealth of cut flowers, so exquisitely and artistically arranged. Supper was on the table, for the Rushtons were plain, early folk, and they liked to dine at half-past one, hear the music of the teaspoons exactly at five, and sup at nine. Mr. Rushton always maintained that late dinners were the cause of half the maladies of fashionable life, and that, if any one wished to pass a particularly wakeful night, he had only to take tea a little before bed-time; and I believe, from my own experience, that he was pretty correct. I would fain have made a hearty meal, in order to satisfy my kind hostess, whose hospitable board was spread with many light delicacies to tempt my appetite; but the effort was in vain, my whole physical nature was about to take its revenge for the strong tension to which it had been submitted for so many days, and I was beginning to feel extremely ill. And very ill I became next day: I rose in the morning struggling against the faintness and lassitude that threatened to overpower me; but after breakfast I fainted, and Mr. Rushton ordered me back to my chamber, where a comfortable sofa was brought for my accommodation, the day being too hot for lying in bed.

My complaint was a mild, but very tedious, nervous fever, of an intermittent kind, and for many weeks I needed medical advice and the tenderest

nursing. I had both in perfection; kinder people than my generous host and hostess never existed, and nothing was left untried that could in any way contribute to my comfort, or my amusement, or the restoration of my health. At length, youth and my naturally sound constitution and good nerves triumphed; the fever left me, my slumbers were light and refreshing once more, and my appetite became as keen as it had been erewhile dull and capricious. I was voted convalescent, and I felt myself able to go forth and begin anew the battle with the world which I seemed fated to encounter.

Of course my father had been written to immediately after his sister's death, and, since the funeral and during my illness, he and Mr. Rushton had carried on quite a voluminous correspondence. Mrs. Rushton also had written to my mother, begging her to make herself quite easy on my account, since my indisposition resulted only from the grief and the shock I had sustained in my bereavement, and its unfortunate results; and she might rely upon my being cared for and petted like a daughter of her own.

Neither had Mr. Fennimore been idle: another and yet another search had been instituted, greatly to the disgust of Mrs. John Ryland, who remarked, "that it was flying against the face of Providence, not to accept one's fate and be thankful for it, whatever it might be." I wonder whether she would have accepted her fate, had she been left suddenly to make her own way in the world, with

subdued spirits, an aching heart, refined and even luxurious tastes, and *nothing* per annum. It is so easy to legislate for others. But no will—no *trace* of any will was found. A celebrated locksmith was sent for, who examined the *secrétaire*, and decided that the locks had not been tampered with; several lawyers in the neighbourhood and one great London authority were consulted, and all agreed that without ample funds it was vain to think of disputing the succession in any legal court, and even then the issue would probably be *not* in my favour. The John Rylands had deeds, and documents, and entails without end to produce; I had only my own convictions, and the testimony of my legal and my medical friend, that a will *had been* executed in my favour. The John Rylands had so much money, that a few thousands would be no more to them than so many sixpences to persons of ordinary income; I, when I had paid for my mourning and discharged one or two little accounts that I owed in the town, found that my worldly wealth amounted to exactly twelve pounds, eleven shillings, and sevenpence halfpenny.

So it was concluded, on all hands, that there was nothing to be done: if there was treachery at work, it had been most artfully devised and most cleverly carried out—at present, clue there was none, and “I must bide my time, and trust to Providence to bring things to a favourable issue,” Mr. Broadway said when he called upon me, a few days before I left *Lunecchester*. The last thing Mrs. Rushton

said to me was, "Don't be hopeless, my child; have patience and be of good faith; God will confound the machinations of evil-doers in his own time. This is your season of trial and discipline, mind you profit by it; and be sure, Milly, that we shall always be your true friends, and we shall keep our eyes and ears wide open, and so will Mr. Fennimore, and even Mr. Broadway; and we shall be ready to act at a moment's notice when we see our opportunity."

Kind, indeed, had the Rushtons been to me; and Mr. Broadway had paid me many attentions, and wished that Mr. and Mrs. John Ryland could be solemnly excommunicated with bell, book, and candle, as in the palmy days of sacerdotal supremacy; but of all my gay friends and fashionable acquaintances, not one thought it worth his or her while to come and see how I fared, or to write to me, or to send me any message of sympathy and consolation. This defalcation humbled me exceedingly; I knew now that what I had taken for genuine admiration was mere flattery; that the attentions I had received as expressions of real esteem and regard were only hollow compliments paid to the supposed heiress of the wealthy Mrs. Ryland; that Miss Kendrick of the Castle House, who, by-the-by, existed no longer, and poor Millicent, the bankrupt tradesman's daughter, were essentially two different and entirely distinct persons.

I thought so, as I packed up my gay and beautiful dresses, and wondered whether I should ever wear them any more. Some of the jewels and

costly trifles my aunt had given me I still retained; others, which I had neglected putting under lock and key, were claimed by the insatiable Mrs. John Ryland; and as I had no actual evidence to show why I might legally retain them, I was obliged to relinquish them, without further parley. As I folded up the dresses, and put away the ornaments, it seemed like putting away the life that in one short year had become to me so natural and so enjoyable: wealth, luxury, and their pleasant adjuncts I must lay down, and once more address myself to toil, and self-denial, and economy. For a brief season I had lived a gay, butterfly life, revelling in flowers and sunshine; now I must be a grub again, and live in obscurity, content with the mere cabbage-leaves of existence. Alas! alas!

Nurse Dent came to me the evening before I took my departure, and we had a long conversation, sitting alone in the twilight of the sultry August evening.

"Dear Miss Kendrick, you will write to me?" said nurse, when she was getting up to say good-bye. "You will write to me, and let me know if you are well and happy?"

"I dare say I shall be well, nurse," I replied, "for I am not sickly or fanciful; but *happy*!—no, I have given up the idea of being happy. I do not mean to seek or to strive after happiness any more."

"I am glad of that," she returned. "Do, my dear, give up *trying* to be happy; and, instead, try

to make everybody around you happy; study their fancies, and their wishes, and their needs from morning to night; and I am very much mistaken if you don't find that answer far better than studying your own wants and likings. But, dear Miss Milly, you will never be truly and lastingly happy till you become a Christian."

"Really, nurse, I think I am as good a Christian as most people. I have been confirmed, and I very often go to the sacrament; and I read my Bible every day, and I believe every word of it. I never read novels, or play dance-music on Sundays; and I speak the truth, and try to keep my temper."

"Ah, my dear, you are like the still-born infant—perfect in his framework and mechanism, but wanting life."

I did not understand her; and as I knew her to be a Dissenter, I concluded that she had imbibed some very peculiar tenets. I bade her farewell with many tears, and with a heavy heart. I have never seen Nurse Dent since; we shall not meet again till we clasp hands in our Father's house.

CHAPTER XVIII.

MY LONDON HOME.

Fields, goods, and far-off chattels we have none—
These narrow bounds contain our private store
Of things earth makes, and sun doth shine upon;
Here are they in our sight—we have no more.

WORDSWORTH.

Now sit we close about this taper here,
And call in question our necessities.

SHAKESPEARE.

AND so I bade a long farewell to the pleasant old town of Luncheon, with its remarkable Castle, its bright river sweeping onwards to the sea, and its purple northern moorlands. In the sunny August morning, I saw its proud, time-honoured towers, and its steeples and houses, grow dim and shadowy in the distance; I saw the dark fells grow dusker and fainter on the horizon and then vanish altogether, leaving the country sadly flat, tame, and monotonous. I felt that, hereafter, hills and mountains must be to me, in every landscape, an essential ingredient of beauty. I could never love a level country, or a waveless horizon, any more. I was able now to travel a considerable distance by railway, so that I escaped staying for the night at an inn, and late in the evening I reached London.

O! the interminable vistas of houses and streets;
O! the town-like aspect of the roads that skirted

the railway; and yet, we were not fairly in London itself. It seemed to me that, if once I reached the heart of this great densely-peopled region, I should never find my way back to fields and woodlands any more; never catch a glimpse of country-life again; never breathe the free air of the fell-side, for which, already, I was beginning to pine. It was dark when we came into the station—a new and singular spectacle to me; and I felt bewildered at the multitude of lamps, the hissing of steam, the yelling of signal whistles, and the roaring of the engines. And then, the landing on the busy platform, where trucks and porters, with their most arbitrary “by'r leave,” were always in full action; the heaps of luggage, the crowds of passengers, so totally unlike the comparatively sleepy fashion of the old coach-times, that were so fast, even then, dying out of existence.

In another minute I saw my brother, and a rush of joy filled my poor weary heart. There he was, looking so handsome and so manly, and several inches taller than when I parted from him, more than a year before. He caught sight of me, and in another minute I had my arm in his, and he was giving orders about my luggage, and piloting me safely through the tumult of people, packages, trucks, and officials. At last we were shut into a cab, and drove off through the lighted streets—not to “the West-end.” And then Harry put his arm round me, and kissed me tenderly, and told me how glad he was to have me at home once more;

and how sorry that I should have been brought back through so much misfortune and sad trouble. And I felt that it was a great blessing to have a kind and loving brother, to whom I might turn in every reverse of circumstances, and who loved me for myself, and not for my position, or presumed expectations. Dear, dear Harry, you were always my friend and counsellor, the sharer of my childish joys and sorrows, my comfort and my pride. Why had I so forgotten you, in my far-away home at Lunechester?

Presently we turned into a dull, narrow street, composed chiefly of shabby-genteel dwelling-houses, of uniform and dingy appearance, with here and there a sprinkling of inferior shops, and a public-house at the end farthest from the great thoroughfare. About the middle of the street my brother signalled to the driver to draw up, and I knew that I had reached the termination of my long, wearisome journey. My father came and nearly lifted me out of the vehicle, and in another moment I was well-nigh torn to pieces with the embraces that were awaiting me. They did me good, though: my heart was never slow to respond to the voice of affection; and at the time I felt that, however untoward the aspect of things might be, I was *at home*. Surely, in that little word *home* there lies a spell for every true English heart; and though home life approves itself most entirely and constantly to English minds, yet are there many scattered far and wide, over so

and land, who never set foot on British soil, and who yet count "*home*" as their best and dearest place on this side heaven. There is a little simple Italian ditty that expresses almost the same idea as our own "Home, sweet home," which says:—

"Be it ever so humble,
There's no place like home."

The Italian song runs thus:—

"Casa mia, casa mia,
Piccolina che tu sia,
Casa mia, casa mia."

I have heard many a poor little itinerant musician singing it to a pretty lullaby tune, not unlike our own "Dulce Domum," and it may be simply translated thus:—

"My home, my home,
Little, little though thou art,
My home, my home."

For the Italian *casa* (house), unlike the French *maison*, is frequently applied in the fuller and deeper sense of *home*.

The child goes home joyfully from its school; the apprentice, in his brief seasons of leisure, hastens home; men and women, weary of the world, go *home* to seek for peace and rest; even the prodigal son comes home to die; or breathing his last, perhaps, in foreign lands, on trackless wastes, or on the bosom of the lonely deep, pines vainly for the home, once slighted and abandoned, but now intensely and passionately desired. "Home, home, sweet home!" And if the homes of earth

be so pleasant and so dear, what must be the home where we hope to spend, not a portion of time, but Eternity itself! The home that is never broken up, where there are no vacant places, no cares from without, no shadows within; the home of the soul, where our Father dwells, and where *He* lives for evermore who said, "Father, I will that they also, whom Thou hast given Me, be with Me where I am; that they may behold My glory, which Thou hast given Me."

But to go back to my home in Chetwode-street. When the first excitement of my arrival was over, I found that I had come back to a very dull, dingy, humble little home indeed. It was something worse than "*piccolina*," though, I dare say, the song means small in pretensions and in appointments, as well as in mere dimensions. I looked with dismay at the little parlour where we were all gathered together; its mean and scanty furniture, its hideous paper—flaunting sky-blue roses on a chocolate ground—its cheap Scotch carpet, and its miserable apology for window drapery. Then the tea equipage—such very common cups and saucers, such a shabby old tray, such leaden-looking spoons, and no butter-cooler, no silver butter-knife, no cake-basket, no muffiniere, no anything beyond what was absolutely necessary for the decent consumption of tea, bread and butter, and toast.

My father looked very much worn; he was thinner, his hair was turning very grey, and he had contracted a stoop, that told of weariness of mind, as

well as of weakness of body. My mother seemed twenty years older than she really was; it was evident that London air and London living did not suit her constitution, never very vigorous at any time; and she looked now, I thought, like some transplanted flower, brought from the fresh, breezy hills, or the wild, free woods, to pine away a short and sickly life, without sunshine, or warmth, or pure air. Rose looked pale and thin, and Susan had not improved in looks since we parted at Radenham; the twins, who looked quite like town children, were gone to bed.

I was struck, too, by the very unstudied toilets displayed by my mother and sisters; and I was very much hurt to find that they wore no mourning, unless, indeed, my mother's old cleaned and re-cleaned, and turned and re-turned, black satinette could be considered as a compromise. I thought she had black ribands in her cap, but they turned out to be dark green by daylight. My father also wore a very unfashionable-looking suit; and Harry, in his counting-house coat and ink-specked linen, sadly annoyed my perceptions of the exterior fitness of things. But my annoyance was presently doubled, and trebled, yea, and quadrupled! We were still busy with our tea-cups, when a bell rang sharply and loudly, and Rose, with a curious glance at me, and a sudden increase of colour, left her seat, as if to obey its summons. I wondered at her, because I had seen, on my arrival, a curious *little animal* in the background, answering to the

name of Prissy, whom I rightly conjectured to be my mother's "maid of all work." And why did not Prissy answer the door?

But Rose went up-stairs, and my surprise increased: was it a part of London caution to reconnoitre visitors after dark, by inspecting them from the upper front windows? Surely not, when there were two men in the house, a greengrocer's opposite, and a provision-shop four doors off.

"It is Mrs. Corder's bell," said my mother, looking as guilty as if Mrs. Corder were some improper character, whom she harboured in her house; my father sighed audibly, and I looked my perplexity, for we seemed to be playing at cross purposes.

"You did not know we had a lodger?" said Susan, speaking as cheerfully as if taking a lodger were as regular a thing as paying taxes.

I nearly fainted on the spot; this was indeed the climax of our degradation; to think that my mother, Mrs. Kendrick, of Ferndown, who used to keep three maids and a boy, should come to let her drawing-room and best bed-room, for the contemptible sum of fifteen shillings a week, for a permanency!

"Ah," said my mother, mournfully, "it's a sad thing, Milly; it's a sad thing to come down in the world—at my age, too. I am sure I often tell your father I wonder how I lived through the shock, and how I have borne up since; but really, for weeks after Mrs. Corder came, I burst out crying every time *that bell rang*. I am sure my poor

father would turn in his grave, if he only knew what his daughter has come to."

At this stage of the conversation, I saw Harry begin to manifest various symptoms of impatience and irritability; and my father drooped his head more and more, and pushed away his untasted cup of tea; and, finally, he rose, and went out of the room, and, after a minute's pause in the little passage, out of the house. As the door slammed to, my mother began to cry, and she exclaimed—"There, now! he will not be back till eleven o'clock: I know he is gone to that detestable 'Greyhound,' and he *knows* how I hate the low place."

"Mother," said Harry, very seriously, "don't you see my father cannot bear to hear you bewailing our misfortunes? He thinks that you reproach *him* for having brought all this trouble upon you."

"And so he has," interposed my mother: "I am sure I was never extravagant: I owed just *eleven and twopence* when he failed; and I had saved a little out of my housekeeping money. It is very hard to be lectured and tutored by one's own children."

"My dear mother," said Harry, "I beg your pardon; but I am sure I have no intention of lecturing you, or of doing anything so entirely out of place; but, you see, it vexes me to find my father put about, and driven to that place which does him harm and brings him in contact with persons unworthy of his notice. It always frets him when you begin to complain of our altered circumstances;

and, mother, if he gets a habit of going regularly to the 'Greyhound'—which I hate as much as you do—I won't answer for the consequences; you cannot tell how far it may go."

"I wonder you are not ashamed of yourself, Harry," returned my poor mother, crying sadly as she spoke, "to say that it is *my* fault that your father goes to a common public-house. But you'll break my heart between you; you none of you care for me; but I hope now Millicent has come home she will take my part. Wasn't it as true as the Bible, every word I said?"

"Yes, mother, yes; quite true. I know it is very, very hard for you. But it's hard, too, for my father. He used to be a master, now he is a servant—he once commanded, now he must obey. He has been accustomed to all the comforts and refinements of life, now he must rough it like a lad; he used to dress like a gentlemen, now his best coat is so shabby that he is ashamed to go to church; and it maddens him to hear you fretting over what 'you are come to.'"

"Ah, well," replied my mother, "you men always take each other's part; I suppose it is natural for sons to uphold their fathers; but I think I might look for a little sympathy from my daughters,"—and she gave a reproachful glance at Susan, whose eyes were fast filling with tears. Then, with a convulsive sob, she rose, and went away to her sleeping room, which was on the ground-floor, at the back of the parlour, where we were sitting.

"It is dreadful!" I exclaimed, when I was left alone with Harry and Susan. "O, Susan, I had no idea things were as bad as they are—this miserable altercation! And are we *obliged* to have a lodger? and is Rose gone to wait upon this Mrs. Corder, who rings her bell so cavalierly in my father's house?"

"You see," replied Susan, "rents are high in London, and yet we must live in it, as both papa and Harry must be near their place of business. Then provisions are dearer than in the country; and washing comes expensive; and papa's salary is frightfully small—he has only £80 a-year at present. When we paid the first quarter's rent, we found we were living beyond our income; and yet, do what we would, we found no further mode of retrenchment. We found that, in order to pay our way, and not get into trouble with our landlord, we must do like our neighbours, and let two of our rooms to some respectable person. A gentleman in business would have been most profitable, and the least trouble; but my father would not hear of it, while we girls are at home; and I really do not see how we can all go out; there must be some one at home to help mamma; she is not nearly so strong as she used to be; and she gets very nervous, and is easily vexed and put about."

"But why in the world does Rose jump up, and act the parlour-maid? Surely that 'small servant,' that stared at me so, might serve the turn of a person who lives in lodgings."

"I am afraid, Milly, she would not serve anybody's turn, but our own; and I assure you, it is no small exercise of patience to put up with Prissy's odd ways. She is honest, and speaks the truth, and she is imperturbably good-tempered; but she is ludicrously stupid, and only clean when she is well routed. Her memory, too, Harry says, is of the cullender species; but I think it is worse—it is more like a large-meshed wire sieve, for it literally retains nothing."

"Tell Milly about the stairs," interposed Harry, with the first genuine smile I had seen on his face all the evening.

"Well, the first Friday she was here, mamma told her the stairs were dirty, and must be scoured. 'Shure, thin, and it's meself 'll do them,' said Prissy, who is a thorough little Irishwoman; so in due time she set to work, humming 'Rory O'More' all the time. Presently we heard talking on the stairs, and in came Mrs. Corder, laughing violently, and asking us if we had invented a new system of stair-scrubbing; we went out, and there was Prissy, floundering in dirty water, and literally scrubbing *upwards*! She had begun at the bottom step, and was diligently working her way to the top. When we had explained to her the mistake she was making, she cried out, 'Shure, thin, and it's thinking I was I would be as wet as the stairs before I got to the top; faith! an' I'll try the top first next time.' Another day, she had used up all her saucepans, and, feeling unwilling to clean one, she boiled the potatoes

in the warming-pan; and only yesterday, when they were smartening up a little for your coming home, Rose says she was cleaning the windows with Bath brick, and, finding that unsuccessful, proposed rottenstone and oil. So, you see, it would be of no use to send her up to Mrs. Corder, who is a very nice woman in some ways, but rather quick-tempered. We tried it, and found it would not answer; there was a hurricane in the drawing-room every hour, and Mrs. Corder gave notice, and Rose and I agreed to wait upon her ourselves; though it falls most heavily on Rose, because I am still a weekly boarder at Miss Beaumont's, thanks to Aunt Ryland's generous kindness."

"She means to set to work in grand style at Christmas," said Harry; "she is going to be a morning governess, and give lessons in the afternoon and in the evening. She means to outrun us all in getting money!"

"I shall get as much as I can," replied Susan, brightly; "money is wanted, so I must work for it. In the meantime I am studying very hard. I only came home this afternoon, and I shall go back to school to-morrow morning. I am sixteen now, you know; it is time I did something to earn my bread and cheese. But this last year has been of incalculable use to me, it makes such a difference being on full terms."

"Ah!" said Harry; "she can tell us, now it is all over, how she had to wash and comb the juveniles, and mend their clothes, and hear them

their spelling, and wash up the tea-things, and keep the laundress's bill, and do plain sewing, and dust the Lady Abbess's imitation antique china, and get her own crumbs of knowledge when and where or how she could."

"I managed to pick up a good many crumbs," returned Susan; "but it is nice to get up in the morning, and go straight to my studies, and to be able to practise and read German, and have my drawing lesson, while my less fortunate successor is darning stockings or checking off the laundress's inventory. I wish I could have seen Aunt Ryland once to thank her for her goodness."

Just then Rose returned, and we had a long talk over our troubles, till we were interrupted by my father's return only a little before midnight. My sisters and I shared one of the attics, Harry and the twins had the other, and Prissy was content to repose herself in a dark closet on the landing. My father and mother, as I said, slept down-stairs, the back parlour being converted into a sleeping apartment; for the two rooms on the first floor were occupied by our lodger, whom I felt I never could forgive, for her impertinence in paying us fifteen shillings a week, and ringing her bell whenever she chose.

What a change from the Castle House, and from Mrs. Rushton's elegant and roomy cottage! All the while I was undressing, I felt like the celebrated old woman, who, waking up from sound slumber, and finding her skirts curtailed, cried out, "Sure, this is none of I."

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I said I was too tired to talk, but I lay awake long after Rose had fallen asleep by my side, thinking of the lost will, and speculating on the vast improvement in our position that would have accrued from my father's and my sisters' legacies, and my own £300 a-year. Till now, I had never felt the full extent of the wrong which I knew some one had inflicted upon me; till now I had never estimated the full value of that of which I had been so mysteriously deprived.

CHAPTER XIX.

DISCIPLINE.

In life's long sickness evermore
Our thoughts are tossing to and fro;
We change our posture o'er and o'er,
But cannot rest nor cheat our woe.

Were it not better to lie still,
Let him strike home and bless the rod,
Never so safe as when our will
Yields undiscovered by all but God?

KEBLE.

A NIGHT's rest and morning sunshine in no wise improved the aspect of things; the house and the street looked dingier and shabbier than ever. Prissy might have passed for a creature just captured from the remotest wilds of Connemara; and Mrs. Corder, apparently impatient for her breakfast, rang her bell with redoubled energy and good-will. All the mobocracy of the neighbourhood seemed to have congregated at the greengrocer's opposite, where a cartload of potatoes and sundry pots of plums were being unloaded. Next door to the greengrocer's was an "Academy for Young Ladies," and at an early hour we were favoured with a sight of the pupils, who were, for the most part, excellent representatives of the Misses Kenwig style of young ladies: there was one pert little thing, with her eight flaxen tails *tied with blue riband*, that I verily believe must

have been the original model of the inimitable Miss Morlcena, of "Nicholas Nickleby" celebrity.

The breakfast, too, was uninviting; I disliked tea in the morning, and my mother had fallen into the London habit of preferring it to coffee; principally, I suppose, because it was, of the two, more palatable without cream, with which, at Radenham, we had always been lavishly supplied. The bread was dry and all crust, the butter indifferent, and the sugar of anything but superfine description; and yet no one seemed to take any note of these disagreeables. My father and Harry drank large cups of scalding hot tea, without either milk or sugar, and ate bread and butter expeditiously, for they had some distance to walk, and business hours commenced at nine o'clock. My mother breakfasted in bed, and I saw Rose carrying in, on her little tray, as an unwonted indulgence, a solitary boiled egg. Susan was already on her way to Canonbury; and the twins, attired in coarse, round-about, brown holland pinafores, were making a feast of a red herring, that had been given them by the good-natured mistress of the provision shop where my mother dealt.

After breakfast, I asked Rose what I could do to help her; and after a little consideration, and a glance at my white hands, and my nice black morning dress, with its spotless collar and cuffs, she decided that the best thing I could do would be to go to my mother's room, and amuse her for a short time, while she made the beds, and

waited upon Mrs. Corder for orders for dinner, et-cætera.

"And the children?" I asked; "do not Fred and Bertie go to school?"

"No; I teach them," replied my sister. "You see, Millicent, there is no thoroughly respectable school in this neighbourhood; they are all after the pattern of the 'academy' opposite; and it would never do to let those wild boys cross the great thoroughfares by themselves; then, again, there is no money to spare for schooling: so I just teach them when I can, and what I can; and they are good little fellows, and only give me trouble now and then, just to show they *are* children, I suppose. When Susan leaves Miss Beaumont's, at Christmas, it will be better; she will manage to spare an hour or two for them; and with her they can begin Latin and French; and Bertie is crazy to be taught drawing—he has evidently a taste for it, and, Susan and Harry think, no common talent."

"Suppose I were to teach them?" I suggested.

"Ah, if you would!" replied Rose, brightening up, "it would be such a good thing, Millicent. They would have regular hours with you, and you could give them more time than I can afford; besides, it would leave me free to look after household matters all the morning, and to attend to the cooking; for Prissy's ideas of the gastronomic art extend only to the boiling of potatoes, with their skins, or, as she says, their *jackets* on. Moreover, she *cannot be taught* the virtue of punctuality, and

papa *must* have his dinner exactly at one o'clock ; Harry does not come home till the evening. And if Prissy were left sole reigning power of the kitchen, and if she *could* cook any kind of meat or pudding, or other vegetables than her beloved 'praties'—which she cannot—we should dine, as far as I can calculate, at about eight o'clock in the evening, which would be more aristocratic than convenient. Well, it will not do to stand chattering here ; shall I tell the children you will be ready for them in an hour's time?"

I replied in the affirmative, and then Mrs. Corder rang her bell for the removal of her breakfast things, and Rose, looking as gay as if she were going to a festival, caught up her tray, and ran up-stairs like any brisk, well-seasoned housemaid. Then I went to my mother, who was just thinking of getting up and going out to the butcher's ; for she thought the walk into the next street would do her good, and Rose wanted a bit of beef to help out her stew.

But, alas ! the "stew" recalled many painful associations ; it suggested the time when economic stews were not compulsory, and when Rose could spend her mornings in study, or fancy needlework, or any other lady-like occupation. And then the conversation of last night was resumed, and my poor mother poured out the full flood of her overwhelming troubles and regrets. I felt that, with her disposition, her natural tendency to a morbid view of circumstances, the present state of things must be

infinitely painful and depressing; and yet I saw plainly that these constant Jeremiads, however much they might relieve her own overwrought feelings, must do infinite harm to the little commonwealth of our straitened household. They tortured my father till he fled from his own fireside; they irritated Rose, who would do anything, bear everything, so long as she was left in peace to work and to endure; and they perplexed the twins, whose childish hilarity was frequently chidden, by word, or hint, or intense piteousness, or, worst of all, by previsions of yet darker days, looming in the distance, when papa would be ill, or die, or lose his situation, and they must get their own living, while she and Rose took in plain sewing or clear-starching. And the children, half-relying on these inauspicious auguries, made their own arrangements accordingly: Bertie was to get a place as errand-boy at a large fancy stationer's shop, where beautiful water-coloured drawings and splendid engravings fired his artistic propensities; while Fred, unbiassed by the promptings of innate genius, thought of going into the itinerant fried fish and baked potato business.

I came out of my mother's room feeling most thoroughly and intensely miserable. The sordid aspect of everything around me depressed my spirits; the gloomy state and prospect of our family fortunes overpowered me; and my mother's assurance that we should all come to the workhouse did not tend to improve my uncomfortable perceptions of things

in general. Then, it was clear that my parents were no longer united, as in earlier and happier days. Unkind hints, suspicions, reproaches, and re-criminations, unheard-of in our pleasant life at Fern-down, were now rife among us. Harry always sided openly, and, I must say, not always quite respectfully, with his father. Rose never would be dragged into giving an opinion upon the merits of any disagreement; but my mother divined, and not untruly, that her daughters, one and all, were very differently constituted from herself, and, no doubt, condemned her in their hearts. Susan's return home every Saturday was always the week's sunbeam; but even she wished "mamma would not look quite so wretched when poor papa came home in the evening, so tired and so worn in spirits."

Altogether, I felt myself in a new world, and entering upon a new course of existence. I sometimes asked myself whether I really was the identical Miss Kendrick who used to visit at Colonel Merriman's, and, strangest of all, who had had the honour of refusing the hand of a handsome and fashionable baronet. But how glad I was now that I had refused him! for I felt quite sure that as soon as my actual position was revealed to him, he would have shrunk from the alliance which he had so ignorantly and unwisely sought. I should then have been rejected, instead of having the merit of a prudent rejection. Nevertheless, my heart felt sorer than usual, when, one rainy autumnal day, the chimney smoking, Prissy scrubbing the passage to the

tune of "St. Patrick's Day in the Morning," my mother "out of friends" with me, as the children emphatically called it, Rose wild with toothache, and inclined for once in her life to be out of temper, and the sky outside of the hue of brown paper—I read in a newspaper my father had brought from the "Greyhound" the night before, the announcement of the marriage of Sir Rowland Lindale and Miss Gifford, at St. George's, Hanover-square! And *I* might have been Lady Lindale—I, who had to throw down the paper and drive back the hot reluctant tears in order to answer Mrs. Corder's bell, because Rose, with her head wrapped up in flannel, was fomenting her face with a steaming decoction of camomile flowers. And then my own griefs had all to be confined to my own aching bosom. The loss of my fortune and the legacies was indeed deeply deplored, it was sometimes canvassed in a tone that gave me great displeasure; but even my father, I soon found, paid but small tribute of sorrow to the memory of her whom I had loved so passionately in life, and almost worshipped in death. How could it be otherwise? The sister and the brother had been separated from childhood, my mother had held very little intercourse with Mrs. Ryland, and, save Harry and myself, no other member of the family had ever even seen her. And, as I said, even the semblance of mourning was neglected, or, to speak more justly, *omitted*; for it was on the score of expense that my mother very sensibly objected to any alteration in her own or my sisters' dress—only my father

and Harry wore black bands on their Sunday hats. Now and then, to Susan, I indulged myself in dwelling sadly on the past; but in a general way I mourned in silence over all that had been so precious, and was so utterly lost.

The winter came; and my heart grew heavier day by day. I hated—nay, even loathed the life I was leading. I did not succeed with my little brothers; they were idle and boisterous, and I was impatient, and slow to make allowances for their tender youth, and their sex, in all its natural vigour, and incipient love of rule, and impatience of petticoat-government. They rebelled, and I put down rebellion with a strong hand: I let them see that they could put me in a passion; and, worst of all, I was glaringly inconsistent; I displayed no more firmness than gentleness, and what excited my wrath, and called for summary correction, on Monday, was allowed to pass uncensured and unpunished on Tuesday. I had thought of taking a governess' situation at Christmas, when Susan returned home; and I had entertained highly-coloured visions of model pupils, interesting charges, grateful parents, and a most liberal salary; for surely, thought I, "all the knowledge and accomplishments I possess must be worth considerable remuneration: I have only to make my qualifications known, in order to ensure a choice of situations, and any amount of stipend I may choose to name."

But I found now that one's own acquaintance with facts and languages is a very different thing

from imparting them to others, especially when those others are considerably one's juniors, and not at all inclined to receive, as a favour, the instruction which costs so much time, and method, and patience to impart. In six weeks I was disgusted with teaching, and resolved not to go forth into the world in the capacity of governess. I decided that to

“——— rear the tender thought,
And teach the young idea how to shoot,”

was not *my* mission. Still I was resolved not to stay at home much longer: the partial estrangement between my parents pained me exceedingly; the social atmosphere of Chetwode-street disgusted me even more than the Latin Primer, and the Child's History of England. As for Mrs. Corder—the pealing of her bell, the sound of her voice, or her step, the sight of her letters as the postman brought them in the morning, and the rustle of her old-fashioned silk dresses, made me feel like an insane creature. Indeed, I sometimes thought it possible that I might become a lunatic, or, at least, a miserable hypochondriac for life. Never was there a more hopeless, unhappy woman than I was, from the period of my aunt's death, and particularly from the era of my leaving Lunechester, till the beginning of the next year. Even Susan's hebdomadal visit, after a while, failed to comfort me: I could not understand her serenity, and was fully prepared to see it disappear as soon as ever she came home to Chetwode-street, at the commencement of the forthcoming vacation.

At length the time came, and Susan left Miss Beaumont to return no more. She lost no time in making arrangements for the future; and, aided by Miss Beaumont, she soon obtained a situation as morning governess, which she declared was a splendid opening for a young and inexperienced beginner—though what constituted the splendour I could not perceive; inasmuch as the children were young, the distance considerable, and the salary ridiculously insignificant to my ambitious ideas. But, not content with her engagement at Hackney, from which she was free by three o'clock in the afternoon, Susan announced herself as ready to give lessons in French, music, and drawing, in the neighbourhood, during the earlier hours in the evening; and she actually succeeded in forming what she called “quite a connection” before the Christmas holidays came to an end. Of course, in such a totally ungentle region, Susan’s terms by the hour, or by the quarter, were not startlingly high; on the contrary, I believe most people would consider them startlingly low.

“But,” as Susan replied cheerfully, when I reproached her with making herself too cheap, “I am very young, only sixteen; though, by dint of looking grave and dressing demurely, people take me for twenty; and people in the higher class of life, whom habit and wealth make particular, would never trust such a juvenile as I am. I must gain experience, get a footing in the governess world, ‘try my ‘prentice hand’ on the unrefined, in order

to be able to advertise 'as a lady accustomed to tuition.' Let me once fairly plant my foot on the lowest rung of the ladder of honourable toil, and, with God's blessing, I will mount to a respectable elevation in due time."

"But why not go out altogether?" I asked. "It would be more comfortable; and the daily walking to and fro, and going out to give lessons after dark, will be very wearying and unpleasant."

"I think," returned Susan, "I am wanted at home; I think I see my home-work portioned out for me, and I must not reject it; besides, Milly, there are disagreeables in every lot; and instead of picking and choosing them, the best way is to take what is sent, remembering *who* sends them."

"Well," I replied, "I think our lot is *all* disagreeables now; at least, I know mine is. Anything more dreary, and sordid, and depressing than our present condition, I cannot conceive."

"You are tired, dear," said Susan, tenderly; "and after the life you led at Lunechester, I do not wonder at your finding this place almost intolerable. You see, *we* became gradually acclimatized, while you, poor Milly! were torn away from luxuries and elegances we have never known, to what must therefore seem of quadrupled gloom and privation. But still, I am sure, things might have been worse with us: we have had no sickness since our misfortunes began; papa is in the receipt of a certain, though small income; we have found a quiet, respectable lodger in Mrs. Corder—"

"Pray don't call that a mercy!" I interposed.

Susan went on:—"We have food and raiment, dear Milly, and therewith let us be content; after all, have we not infinitely more than we deserve?"

Finding I did not answer, she continued:—"If we can but make up our minds to our lot, whether it be crooked or straight, I am sure the greatest of our troubles is overcome. I should like to be

" 'Willing to give thanks, and live
On the least that heaven can give.' "

"And are you not?" I asked, almost scornfully; "you seem strangely content with your present position, and I aver, say what you will, that Heaven cannot give you much less than you now enjoy."

"It gives more than you think," replied Susan, gravely; "besides, its very troubles are blessings in disguise. We needed discipline, or God would not have sent it; if we can only profit by the lesson that is given us to learn, we shall acknowledge by-and-by, that *all*—yes, even what seems worst now—has been *ordered* for us. I should not like to think that any discomfort, however trifling, came from chance."

"You are a strange girl," I replied, thinking all the time that she and Nurse Dent were very similarly constituted, and wondering how it felt, always to have, in one's secret heart, a substratum of peace and happiness wherein to repose. *Happiness!*—where should I find it?—for, in spite of my declaration, that I would not *try* to be happy any more, I was still, though almost in despair, wildly pursuing the phantom that seemed determined to elude my eager

grasp. Sorely, sorely, I struggled against the circumstances of my lot; I did not know that—

“God lays an open book before
His little children’s eyes;
They must not turn the pages o’er,
But read them and grow wise:
One only can they understand—
The page laid open by God’s hand.

• The ciphered pages all describe,
To him who owns the book,
The circumstances of his lot,
Its blessings, and its crook;
And much a child may learn from thence,
If studied with due reverence.

Whether the children’s tasks are learned,
Or idly left undone,
Is not inquired—the page is turned,
When a fixed time is come;
But when a page is once turned o’er,
No child can ever find it more.”*

Alas! my tasks were left unlearned from wilfulness and pride, rather than from idleness. As the dreary days passed slowly on, page after page of the book of my experience was unstudied, unappreciated; and night after night the page was turned to be re-opened no more, till that great day, when the dead, both small and great, shall stand before God, and the books shall be opened, and the dead judged out of those things which were written in the books.

* *Vide* “School-time.”—The Dove on the Cross.

CHAPTER XX.

AN INVITATION TO BREAKFAST.

Enrapt I gaze, and wonder, and adore,
That human art should raise with magic power
So fair, so grand a temple! And that *Time*,
Awed by its sacred beauty, passeth o'er
Its fretted turrets; nor doth drop his wing,
To leave a moulted feather—but to fling
An added charm around this hallowed pile of yore.
MRS. EMERSON.

I soon found out what Susan believed to be her home-work. Her last evening lesson was given from seven to half-past, and by eight o'clock she had reached home, taken off her bonnet, and established herself in the parlour, where after tea we were commonly assembled together. My father's eyes were rather weak, and after a long day's writing he was fain, when he tarried by his own fire-side, to sit still with his hands before him, either ruminating on his troubles, or else listening, till annoyance swelled into resentment, to the detail of my poor mother's inexhaustible grievances!

For this hour of moody silence, or painful re-
crimination, Susan endeavoured to find a remedy;
she undertook to read aloud, and the proposition
meeting with universal favour, she took care to
provide herself with such books as could not fail
to amuse and to interest her hearers. Henceforth,

our evening lecture, as we called it, became the point to which we looked forward through the day; and Susan on her return used to find us all assembled, Harry and Rose all-impatient for the resumption of the tale, and my father delighted to sit peacefully on his own hearth, and lose sight of his own reverses, in the recital of the joys or adversities of others. Generally, too, my mother in spite of herself became interested in the story, and not unfrequently entered into conversation, at supper-time, on the merits of the different characters represented in the book. Susan's expedient was eminently successful.

She could, however, give but little time to the boys, and I am ashamed to say the longer I taught them the less I effected. Lesson-time was nothing else than a season of guerilla warfare; and sometimes my mother interfered and took part with "the little ones," as they were still called, and then open war was proclaimed, and dire was the wordy conflict, and many were the tears that were shed over blotted copies and half-learned declensions, and sums that never would come right on any terms.

It was a relief to everybody when, the week before Christmas, my father declared that, for a whole month, lesson-books should be interdicted, and slates confined to purposes of amusement.

Christmas passed away sadly enough. I watched the old year die out and the new year rise pale and grey over a frozen world, thinking the while how pure the snow lay on the northern moors, and

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how the soft white flakes would lodge on the ledges and among the battlements of Lunechester Castle, and how the ice-cold wind would moan through the ancient hall and the deserted chambers of the far-away south wing. I wondered how the Castle House looked now, this Christmas-tide, under the rule of the obnoxious John Rylands. Then I thought of last year's gaiety, of the stately old mansion echoing with the strains of festal music, and the light tread of the dancers; I thought of the grand staircase and the long corridor brilliantly lighted up, and the great hall, radiant with flowers, and silvery lamps, and fair young forms. And I thought of the part I had borne in those Christmas revels; how I danced, and sang, and talked, and moved among the joyous throng, as the cherished daughter of the house; how I was flattered, and caressed, and openly admired, as the heiress of the rich and beautiful Mrs. Ryland. And now, where were all the friends of my brief day of prosperity? Echo might answer, "Where?"

Gone! all gone! Gone the brightness and the luxury; gone the sylph-like robes, and the flowery wreaths, and the sparkling gems; gone the state, and the wealth, and the song, and the dance; gone the honied words, and the fair-seeming vows, and the tender assurances; and gone, too, the real and deep love that had been showered on my quick-beating, undisciplined heart!

And as I sat alone at midnight by the expiring fire, while the bells of the great city were ringing

out the requiem of the passing year, was it strange that I should draw the contrast between present and past scenes, and that memory should clothe in their fairest guise the hopes and the joys that were mine no longer? There was the ash-strewn hearth, the dim, solitary candle, the silent, meanly-furnished room, and I, cowering over the smouldering embers, with an aching heart, and a wild longing to escape from the misery that pressed me down on every side. And far away—and yet so near that it seemed but a few days ago—was the glitter and excitement of last year's festivities. The lavish profusion, the warmth and the light, the old-fashioned hospitality, and the costly robes, at once so rich and so simply graceful, as befitted my girlish appearance, seemed about me once again, and the voices of the past came ringing in my ears with thrilling distinctness.

Last year I was *dancing* when its latest midnight gave place to New Year's morning; now I was keeping my lonely watch, making my vain moan over the sweet, faded past, and viewing my present position in sadness and bitterness of spirit. And the bitter sadness was vain as the thoughtless revel! I had forgotten my rest; or, to speak more truly, I had never found it.

Far happier were my sisters: Rose, as I found her afterwards, wrapped in her soft, innocent sleep, so well earned by a day of hard, uncongenial toil, unselfish exertion, and self-denial; and Susan, wakeful but serene, thanking God for the mercies of the *past*, and trusting him implicitly for the

dim, unpromising future. Happy Susan! she possessed a treasure that could not be taken from her grasp—a treasure all unrecked of by those around her. And to a great extent, I might say also, happy Rose! For, unwittingly, she had caught something of Susan's simple faith and earnest desire to walk in the oft-times thorny path of present duty. Rose was not very clever; but she loved to dream over a book of poems, and to fancy herself the heroine of one of her favourite romances: to live in a castle on the borders of a gloomy forest, and to have a lover who played the lute, was, for many years, the height of her ambition. The very mention of corridors, tapestry, pine-woods, ancient armour, &c., &c., had for her an unspeakable charm, and even now kindled her enthusiasm to the highest pitch.

And, alas! instead of living in a castle, listening to the wind meaning along mysterious passages, or roaring like the sea in the dark pine-trees hard by, she inhabited an ugly, inferior, and very inconvenient house in a London street, and heard the wind among the chimney-tops as it mingled with the cries of itinerant vendors, the shouts of children, and the roar of the great thoroughfare near at hand. Instead of working embroidery, and playing the lute, or wandering in a half-wild garden, receiving mysterious communications from a superannuated gardener engaged in training the branches of a tree, planted, in the first instance, by a beloved and angelic mistress, who died suddenly and

strangely—poisoned, probably, by a jealous husband, or a secret implacable enemy—poor Rose was obliged to mend venerable stockings, patch the trowsers of her little brothers, make savoury dinners out of bare remnants of joints, and attend to the creature comforts of the respectable Mrs. Corder. But Rose did her duty, not, perhaps, without a sigh for what *might* have been; and she was happy—or, at least, far happier than myself.

All this time Mrs. Corder and myself made no progress in our acquaintance. Now and then, sorely against the grain, I had carried up her tray, or her letters, or waited upon her to inquire what she would choose for her dinner; but on such occasions I comported myself with what I considered to be a suitable dignity and reserve, resisting all her efforts to draw me into conversation, and answering her inquiries with the fewest words consistent with common civility. I dare say she thought me a very foolish, disagreeable girl—when young people try to put on airs of grandeur, they always succeed in making themselves superlatively ridiculous.

But, one cold January morning, I—and, indeed, all of us—were astonished by a message she sent down by Susan, who had just carried up her matutinal dry toast and frizzled ham, the odour whereof cruelly provoked the appetite of Fred and Bertie, as they addressed themselves to their accustomed humble fare of weak tea and bread and treacle.

“*Mrs. Corder’s compliments to Miss Kendrick,*

and she would feel much obliged by her breakfasting with her this morning, as she wishes to consult her on business of importance." And, counting upon my immediate acquiescence, she had already desired Susan to bring up another cup and saucer, and make some more coffee—"strong and hot;" and provide fresh relays of toast—"nice and crimp;" and ham—"not over-broiled, but yet thoroughly cooked." At first I thought I would not go; but my father would not allow me to hesitate, and I really felt extremely curious about the important business that was to be submitted to the valuable judgment of my eighteen and a-half years' experience in mundane affairs. Rose thought I was highly complimented, and Susan augured all kinds of improbable things; Harry, as he brushed his hat, wondered what was in the wind now; and even the twins were roused to excitement in imagining the splendid repast that awaited me in the forbidden regions of the drawing-room. And just as I was preparing to obey the courteous summons of our lodger, Fred, who was finishing his last modicum of bread and treacle in the kitchen, rushed upstairs, in the most violent excitement, to announce that "*she had ordered eggs too!*" and Bertie declared that "*the ham smelt glorious.*"

Totally unmoved by the prospect of the feast, I quietly ascended the stairs, knocked at the drawing-room door, gravely made my morning salutations, and waited in proud humility till I should be bidden to sit down. The bidding came in a most singular

fashion: as I still lingered standing, Mrs. Corder looked up impatiently and exclaimed, "What the plague doesn't the girl sit down for? Is it the fashion in the North, I wonder, to break one's fast standing?"

So I sat down more than half offended, but feeling, nevertheless, that I had to deal with a very forcible and original sort of person.

Breakfast began, and I must confess I found the coffee delicious; its very aroma, as I stirred it in my cup, soothed my irritated pride, and charmed me into easy good temper; and all the time I was sipping the fragrant draught, and manipulating my knife and fork, I was conscious that Mrs. Corder was watching me with the closest attention. By degrees we fell into an animated strain of conversation; we discussed innumerable subjects; and I discovered that my hostess was an educated woman, and, notwithstanding a certain freedom of speech, well-bred, and accustomed to good society. The table was cleared before the important business was introduced.

"Miss Kendrick," began Mrs. Corder, when we were again alone, "I told you that I had important business to discuss, not exactly my own, but a friend's and *yours*, if you choose to make it such. Some years ago, when I was a richer woman than I am now—for I know, as well as your father, what *reverses* mean—I lived in the Cathedral city of Altisbury; in fact, my husband was one of the prebends, and held a valuable living in Altisbury besides; and among my friends there was a certain

Mrs. Winchester, then the wife, but now the widow, of the Dean of Altisbury. Mrs. Winchester and I have never ceased to correspond; it has become a sort of habit with us to exchange letters every month or six weeks; and yesterday morning I received from her one of these periodical communications. She has had living with her several nieces, orphan daughters of the late Dean's brother, and now the last of them is married; and as a solitary life is her abhorrence, she is very anxious to engage some young lady to reside with her as companion, and it immediately struck me that you would probably have no objection to undertake such a situation. Your sister says you do not like teaching, and London air does not agree with you—you will find Altisbury extremely healthy. The Cathedral is very fine, if you care for that sort of thing; you will drive out daily and see a good deal of society, and the salary is £50 per annum; but it will be necessary that you should dress handsomely. Now go away and think about it, and come to me this evening an hour before post-time and let me know your decision, and also your father's and your mother's views upon the eligibility of your engaging yourself as companion to my friend Mrs. Winchester."

Thus dismissed, I went away, and after half-an-hour's secret cogitation in my bed-room, I went down-stairs to acquaint my mother and Rose with what had taken place, and to discuss the matter with them.

There was but one opinion, and that entirely

accorded with my own inclinations—that I should take advantage of the opportunity thus presented, and once more leave the parental roof and see what I could do to better my own fortunes.

So that evening the letter conveying the decision was duly written and posted; and in two days came another epistle from the Dean's widow, intimating her satisfaction with the arrangement made by her kind friend, Mrs. Corder, and requesting Miss Kendrick to present herself at Altisbury with as little delay as possible; my travelling expenses were to be paid by my new patroness. And now I was so busy that I had not time to be unhappy; and Hope once more sketched upon her golden tablets a brilliant and delightful perspective. Any change, I thought, must be for the better; and the society of an aristocratic Cathedral city must be infinitely preferable to the dingy obscurity of Chetwode-street. So we all set to work, and my beautiful dresses once more saw the light; and, very reluctantly, I was obliged to discard my mourning, because it was too shabby to figure at Altisbury. and I had not money to equip myself anew. I understood now why, on my return home, I had found my mother and sisters in coloured raiment, while I was as black as a hearse.

My feelings towards Mrs. Corder underwent a violent revulsion; and I now hailed her as my deliverer and my best friend. She might have rung the bell till it broke, and I should not have considered her conduct impertinent. She had opened

my cage, unbarred my prison doors, rescued me from a bondage that had seemed as hopeless as it was oppressive. But instead of ringing us up and down-stairs, she gave as little trouble as possible, in order not to interfere with my preparations; and she actually assisted at the turning of my best black silk dress, which was principally renovated and embellished under her own inspection, and in her own sitting-room.

In an incredibly short space of time I was ready: my trunks were once again packed, wrapped, and corded, farewells were once more exchanged, and Harry escorted me to the Paddington station, and saw me comfortably settled in a first-class carriage, and my luggage safely ensconced in the luggage-van. He stood on the platform till the train started.

Presently the engine gave a yell, then a snort, and then it backed a yard or two, and then we were fairly on our way to the Western Counties; and Harry waved his handkerchief till I lost sight of him, and London and Chetwode-street were left behind, and Altisbury Cathedral Close, and the new life, were before me.

My journey was quite uneventful, only it was bitterly cold; and I hoped Mrs. Winchester would have a warm fire, as well as a warm welcome for me. Past the royal towers of Windsor, by the domes and steeples of Oxford, and through the chalky Vale of the White Horse, our good train sped upon its way; and by two o'clock I had exchanged the rail for the high road, and when the Cathedral clock

struck four, I was entering the quiet, beautiful Close; bounded on one side by the stately pile of the magnificent Cathedral, and at the eastern end by the cloisters, and the grey old Deanery, where Mrs. Winchester had once resided.

She lived now, however, in a handsome, old-fashioned house, on the southern side of the Close, and there, in another minute, the carriage stopped, and I had reached my destination. Though, after the Castle House, the grandeur of the Close was not very imposing, I was yet very well satisfied to observe a certain air of substantial and well-appointed comfort about my new abode, as I thus beheld it for the first time. I was received by Mrs. Winchester's maid—a thorough contrast, however, to Mrs. Susannah—who, with all possible respect, informed me that her mistress was taking her afternoon nap, from which she was never disturbed on any account; but that my room was ready for my reception, and she would be happy to wait on me, and bring me a cup of tea, or any refreshment I might choose.

All this was very encouraging; and I found my room all that the most fastidious and exacting *dame de compagnie* could desire. It was large, handsomely furnished, softly carpeted, and delightfully warm; for a noble fire was blazing on the hearth, before which was drawn a luxurious easy chair, a footstool, and a small round table furnished with writing materials. In front of the dressing-table and the *washing-stand* were large mats of silky, woolly

texture, in which my feet seemed to bury themselves, so that it was quite a luxury to stand upon them. No draughts could penetrate the well-closed, curtained windows, and yet I was sure that in the summer it would be delightfully airy; for I could see, far away beyond the Cathedral and the cloisters, a beautiful hilly country, and upland downs, whence the breeze must come sweeping pleasantly and healthfully, on warm, fragrant midsummer days.

The Cathedral itself was right opposite my windows, though between it and Mrs. Winchester's house intervened a broad, well-kept space of smooth turf, twice as large as the dear old Castle Green at Luncheon, of which, in some sort, it reminded me so strongly, that the tears sprang to my eyes as I stood surveying the prospect. Then, all round the shaven sward, was a wide, gravelled carriage-drive, with side-walks under the trees, and under the grey walls of the Cathedral. The rooks were cawing loudly, and wheeling about the great tower and the leafless trees, where last year's nests were plainly to be discerned—altogether the picture pleased me, and I promised myself many a quiet stroll in those grey, solemn-looking cloisters, and many an hour's full feast of sound and architectural beauty, in the long arched aisles, and the ancient chapels, of the far-famed, glorious Cathedral.

But Wingfield—the maid—hinted that time was passing, and that Mrs. Winchester would probably soon awake, and be disappointed if I were not ready to join her in the drawing-room; so upon her word

I acted, and straightway made my toilet, and further refreshed myself by an excellent cup of tea.

"You see, ma'am," said Wingfield, when she was leaving me, "this is your caddy; it is my place to keep it filled with tea and sugar; this kettle belongs to your room, and you have only to ring for cream when you want it. My mistress likes herself to get a cup of tea whenever she fancies it, without the trouble of sending to the kitchen; and she thought the same arrangement would probably suit you. I will send the under-housemaid, ma'am, with more coals, presently, and as soon as Mrs. Winchester awakes, I will come and tell you."

Could anything be more satisfactory? If, as was probable, the maid took her tone from her mistress, I had indeed fallen upon pleasant times and circumstances. And, after Chetwode-street, how quiet, how aristocratic, how luxurious seemed the whole character of Mrs. Winchester's house in Altisbury Cathedral Close! While I was thus musing, Wingfield appeared again:—"Her mistress was waiting to receive me."

With a hasty glance at myself in the mirror, and a heart beating high with hope and uncertainty, I followed the maid, and soon found myself on the threshold of the drawing-room, and ready to enter the august presence of the late Dean's widow.

CHAPTER XXI.

FRESH EXPERIENCES.

But hark! from yonder tower
The day is tolled into eternity.
How hollow, dread, and dismal is the peal
Now rolling up its vast account to heaven!
Awhile it undulates, then dies away
In muttered echoes, like the ebbing groans
Of drowning men; and see, the toiling moon
Is in a fane of clouds,—and I am lone,
Unseen, but by the Sleepless One.

R. MONTGOMERY.

THE lamps were lighted when I entered the drawing-room, and saw sitting by the fire, in a luxurious lounging chair, a lady of about sixty-five years of age. She wore a very rich brocade silk, and a costly lace mantle; her cap, of superb texture, was of comparatively juvenile make, and was elegantly decorated with rose-coloured artificial flowers; moreover, beneath the cap was a brilliant complexion, and a profusion of the loveliest auburn ringlets imaginable.

“Come here, Miss Kendrick! come here, my dear, and let me look at you!” cried a voice that betrayed the three-score years of its *blooming* owner. I went up to the chair, and three white jewelled fingers were put into mine, and two piercing grey eyes looked into mine, and seemed to search me through and through. I bore the scrutiny as com-

posedly as I could, though I felt the colour rising to my brow, and I felt, too, very much like a newly-hired servant undergoing inspection from her mistress. I was glad when the eyes were withdrawn, and that without any signs of dissatisfaction. My outward woman at least was not displeasing in her sight, and I hoped that my character and general bearing might be equally approved.

"Now, my dear, make yourself comfortable," said Mrs. Winchester presently; "I like to be comfortable myself, and to see everybody about me comfortable also. No, don't sit in that chair, its back is so straight, and it looks so uncompromising; when there is no company you may have that nice little rocker. There, that will do. Will you not have a screen? a scorching fire is terrible for the complexion—I should not like you to injure your looks, while you are with me. And now tell me, how did you leave my excellent friend, Mrs. Corder?"

I replied that I left Mrs. Corder in very good health, and that she desired every kind remembrance to Mrs. Winchester.

"Ah! I am glad to hear it. We are very old friends; we came to Altisbury about the same time, and we were brides together."

I was rather surprised to hear this, for I happened to know that Mrs. Corder was more than twenty years younger than Mrs. Winchester; but I supposed that my patroness might have remained *single till she was verging on old-maidism, and*

that her friend might have been married as girls sometimes are, when she ought to have been in the school-room. The next remark was—"Ah! Mrs. Corder is getting quite an elderly lady now, and I am not as young as I used to be, my dear. How does she wear? does she keep her looks as well as I do?"

A most perplexing question, for I could not help believing that the roses on Mrs. Winchester's cheeks were about as natural as those in her cap, and, of course, I knew that the long, glossy, auburn ringlets were hers, only because they were purchased with her money. And Mrs. Corder was pale and sallow, and she wore her own iron-grey hair in plain braids, under a simple inexpensive cap. What Mrs. Winchester might be in her night cap, with the rouge and pearl powder washed off her face, and her flowing ringlets deposited on her dressing-table, I could not imagine; and I never had any opportunity of judging, for, during my whole stay at Altisbury, I was never admitted to Mrs. Winchester's presence when she was in bedroom costume. Once, when she was unwell, I read to her as she lay in bed, but I was not sent for till the regular process of beautifying had been fully accomplished.

At length, after some consideration, I replied that Mrs. Corder had no colour, and that her hair was very grey, and that I fancied she did not care about preserving her good looks.

"A very great mistake, my dear," said Mrs.

Winchester—"a most lamentable mistake, and one into which I hope you will never be betrayed. We owe it to society—it is a paramount duty to make ourselves look to the very best advantage. Now I dare say Mrs. Corder's teeth are gone?"

And as she spoke she parted her rosy lips and showed two perfect rows of the daintiest little ivories I ever saw. "Are they as sound as mine?" she asked smilingly.

"No, indeed," I replied; and I felt, at the same time, that my own, though perfectly white and tolerably regular, would not bear comparison with those small, symmetrical pearls. I began to wonder whether there was anything real about Mrs. Winchester, and I fervently hoped she might prove less artificial in character than she was in person.

By-and-by dinner was announced, and we went down and dined sumptuously, and sat a long time over our dessert. When we returned to the drawing-room, I found a small table brought near the fire, and on it a pack of cards and a cribbage-board. I saw at once what my evening occupation was likely to be.

"Of course you play cribbage, Miss Kendrick?" said Mrs. Winchester, as she settled herself in her chair, and drew the little table close to her, and began to shuffle the cards. I replied that I did.

"There is nothing in the world equal to cribbage," said Mrs. Winchester, energetically: "talk of whist, it is not fit to be mentioned in the same breath! Though, *my dear*, I have my whist parties as a duty ;

one must not be selfish; and in a Cathedral city, whist is always *the* game; so, upon occasion, as you will see, I can make up from a dozen to twenty tables. It's my crib, of course—I am a little older than you are, my dear, and, with two ladies, seniority has the preference: besides, a married woman, you know, my dear, always takes precedence of a single one. Ah, dear, I have the most wretched hand."

So we began to play, and for hours our conversation was limited to such interesting remarks as—"You deal"—"my turn-up"—"fifteen-two, fifteen-four, and a pair's six, and a pair is eight."

I was heartily tired when, at eleven o'clock, we laid down the cards, in order to do justice to the wine and water and dry biscuits, which a retired verger in the character of butler brought up for our refreshment. I wondered whether this first evening was a fair sample of Altisbury evenings in general; and whether playing cribbage would be my principal duty as companion to the Dean's widow. I wondered, too, whether we should have family prayers when the biscuits and the hot wine and water were duly discussed; it seemed very likely, considering the ecclesiastical atmosphere of the place, and the probable habits of the Dean himself, when he was in the land of the living.

But no; our supper concluded, Mrs. Winchester returned to the cribbage-board, and, till the Cathedral clock solemnly and sonorously struck *one*, we were busy shuffling, dealing, cutting, and pegging,

as if the one object of human life—in a Cathedral Close, at any rate—was to play as many games at cribbage as possible. How weary I was, long before the great clock tolled my release! How hard it was to suppress an occasional gape! and when the gape became inevitable, how difficult to prevent its extension into an unmistakeable yawn! Mrs. Winchester chid me at last—very politely though—for mistaking clubs for spades, and for pegging after a fashion quite unjustifiable as regarded the rules of arithmetic; and I believe, before the last game was played out, I was nearly dreaming, and wondering whether the glossy auburn ringlets, and the briar roses and laces that restrained them, were actual realities, or mere fantasies of slumber. I half expected to wake up and find myself in the attic at home, with Rose and Susan, ready to begin the toils and turmoils of the day.

At last Mrs. Winchester announced herself ready for bed, remarking, “that as I had had a long journey, we would sit up no longer; but *generally* she did not care to keep early hours.” With a smothered yawn, I marvelled what late hours would be, if she called this early; though early in one sense it certainly was, the new day being just begun. Then she asked what time I usually rose. I replied, “About seven, or, in the dark mornings, perhaps a little later.”

Mrs. Winchester uttered an exclamation of horror, and besought me to abandon so pernicious a practice immediately. “Indeed,” she continued, “I must

request you not to rise before eleven in this house. I always breakfast in my own room; and it will be better that the housemaid should bring yours to you before you dress. The effort of making one's toilet, before one has had a cup of coffee or tea, and a muffin, and an egg or two, is quite too much for any but the most robust and plebeian constitutions; and, in fact, there is something decidedly vulgar in rising and going about one's business before the day has fairly commenced. I do not think I *could* live with a person who habitually rose at seven o'clock. Why, persons of position are then scarcely in their first sleep; and while you are with me, my dear, you are a person of position, and must conform to the customs of rank; so, pray, never say another word about seven, or eight, or nine o'clock; don't let the servants suspect that you ever gave way to so unlady-like a habit; and never leave your room, as a general rule, till the Cathedral clock has struck eleven."

I thought if I never went to bed before one in the morning—or, still worse, as my patroness hinted, before *three*—there was not much danger of my transgressing in the way she feared. Besides, I hated early rising as much as any one: the seven o'clock business was in conformity with the hard rule of Chetwode-street, altogether compulsory, and I must confess, strictly speaking, only nominal. Prissy used to call us at seven, and I used to doze on, till Rose and Susan were gone down-stairs, and then I most reluctantly left my

bed, grumbling, and repining, and fretting all the while I was making my toilet. No! I was quite ready, under any circumstances, to adopt new and more congenial habits; but the idea of its being *vulgar* to rise early was quite new to me, and I could not receive it as an indisputable axiom. After a little consideration, I made up my mind that early rising was extremely uncomfortable, and always to be avoided, if practicable; but that it was not only thoroughly respectable, but, in most cases, praiseworthy, there could be no doubt whatever.

In the gallery outside, I met Wingfield going to Mrs. Winchester's room; she looked dreadfully sleepy, and I dare say she had just been waked up from a comfortable nap; it was past two before I lay down, and in five minutes I was far away in the shadowy, fantastic dream-land. Probably the sound of the Cathedral clock, close at hand, chiming the quarters, and striking the hours, disturbed, though it did not awake me; for all night long I dreamed that the clock was striking *one* — now in the silvery tones of my dear aunt's musical time-piece, now in the hard, sharp voice of the old-fashioned clock on the landing at Agenoria House, now swelling and dying from the towers and steeples of the great metropolis, now quietly murmuring over the graves in the churchyard at Ferndown, and now tolling deep and loud, with mighty reverberations, from some mysterious land, where it was always night, and always solitary and silent. And, strange to say,

there blended with my dream a solemnity and a misgiving that had not presented themselves in the actual sound. I had heard "the bell strike one," and taken no note thereof, save to deplore my excessive weariness; but now, in the visions of night, when eyes and ears were closed to sights and sounds of the outer world, there came to my mind the remembrance of the homilies of my childhood, when I was told by my governesses of the value of time, of its being a preparation for eternity, and of the solemn warning conveyed in the notes that told that the hours had glided away, never more to return. And a painful sense of time misspent, years wasted, and opportunities lost, haunted my restless dreams, till at last I woke, and saw the sunshine on the Cathedral towers, and heard the cawing of the rooks among the leafless trees in the Close. Then I slept again, and so soundly that, when I once more opened my eyes and consulted my watch, I rang the bell for my breakfast, with a fear that I might be reprimanded for being *too* late, rather than *too* early.

But my misgivings were needless; I breakfasted, dressed with all due care, and found my way to the drawing and dining-rooms, and discovered that Mrs. Winchester was not yet visible, nor had she in any way required my services, or my presence. Presently I strolled away into the library, and beguiled the time with inspecting the contents of the shelves, that entirely lined the walls.

There was nothing very attractive;—Greek and

Latin tomes in abundance, rare mathematical treatises, divinity of all ages, and commentaries enough to furnish an university. Except a few dramatical books, there did not seem to be a single book that I cared to read.

So I went back to the drawing-room, and there I found literature enough—novels of all kinds, and of every shade of merit; and I soon selected something to my taste, and forgot all about Mrs. Winchester in the exciting incidents of my story.

At length, however, she made her appearance, most elegantly attired, in a morning costume that would have suited myself admirably, and that did not suit Mrs. Winchester at all. As I beheld by broad daylight her golden ringlets, her regular white teeth, her delicately roseate cheeks, and her tasteful *cache-mire* robe, fresh from Paris, and saw at the same time the wrinkles, that would not be coaxed away, and the lines about the mouth, that indisputably revealed the lapse of more than three-score years, and the eyes, that had lost the brilliance of youth and middle age, I could not help recalling one of my father's homely and inelegant similes—"an old ewe, dressed lamb fashion."

I was asked how long I had been down-stairs; and I received a nod of approval, when I replied that I had not left my chamber till very nearly noon. Then came the question, "Was I fond of reading?" "Yes, very fond of it; I liked it better than anything." And then the rejoinder, "I am charmed, my dear, to hear it; I foresee that we

shall suit one another exactly; you are an excellent hand at cribbage, and I am sure you play whist well; if I only find that your reading is agreeable, I shall have every reason to be rejoiced that I have been fortunate in securing so charming a '*dame de compagnie*.' " Of course I could only curtsy, and look silly, and make some senseless, unconnected speech, about my own good fortune; and then my patroness began to turn over the heaps of books that lay about, and, making choice of one, desired me forthwith to sit down, and read the first chapter aloud—"for you see, my dear, I very imprudently walked in the Close one evening last autumn, when the dews were falling; and the result was, a severe and prolonged attack of influenza, and since then my eyes have been weak; and it injures them to read any kind of print; so it will be a part of your duty to read to me for some hours every day."

I had the wisdom not to breathe a word about spectacles, though they suggested themselves to my mind as likely to contribute to the comfort of a lady of six decades and upwards. But then, how would they harmonize with those child-like roses, and those bright, luxuriant ringlets? Mint sauce, or gooseberry sauce, to venerable, tough mutton, would cease to be an incongruity, compared with the spectacles and the youthful charms of the Dean's blooming widow.

I opened my book: it was a translation from the French, a very good translation, equally faithful and spirited; the story was well-written, the style

piquant, the incidents exciting, the interest unvarying, the whole narration striking and highly seasoned. It was only lacking in two particulars, viz., morality and modesty. Vice was dressed out with scrupulous elegance, and crowned with flowers that might have befitted Innocence herself. Indecency was skilfully veiled under a flimsy robe of refined language, and the sparkling ornamentations of wit, and unmis-takeable, though misdirected genius. As I read I was alternately charmed and disgusted; and ever and anon I looked at my companion to see whether some expression or manifest allusion had not wounded her delicacy and offended her good taste.

Faulty as I was, I shrank instinctively from that which was not pure; but Mrs. Winchester found no fault with the author, and listened complacently for hours—for I read on till luncheon was announced, and afterwards till it was time to dress for dinner. And here, if I may be allowed, I will say a very few words to my young friends, on the subject of their light literature, of which, in this day, there is such an unbounded and varied supply. I recoiled from the gilded pollution of that first novel, but as time passed on, and I read another and another of the same character, I felt less indignation and less repulsion; and though I never enjoyed such pages, I yet came to read them with careless indifference, without a blush on my cheek or a stirring of womanly annoyance in my heart. There is great truth in the old proverb, “One cannot touch pitch without being defiled.”

and one cannot read that which is innately impure, however brilliantly or poetically it may be arrayed, without injury to one's moral nature. The bloom on the grape, the rich down on the butterfly's wing, the lines of the photograph fresh from the camera, are not more easily destroyed than that instinctive purity which is woman's highest honour, her truest dignity, and the very crown and glory of her womanhood. If an author once startles your delicacy, immediately close the page, whatever may be its fascinations and its merits as a mere literary production. It may be hard to do this the first time, especially if no eye save your own see the questionable words; but if there be any compromise, it will be far more difficult on the next occasion; and instinctive delicacy once lost, it can never be restored. As well may you seek to bring back the prismatic hues of the collapsed bubble, as strive to regain the innocent freshness of a mind that has permitted itself to come in contact with that which is either apparently or insidiously unclean. There is no excuse for such laxity and so vitiated a taste, for in our day there are abundance of books that are full of incident, and abounding in beautiful passages, and written with the pen of genius—books that contain not one line, not one word, not one hint that it was sin to have written, or that it is shame to peruse. And let the elders be duly careful as to what books the young people are permitted to read for their pleasure and recreation.

CHAPTER XXII.

THE CATHEDRAL CLOSE.

"Go to the grave of buried love, and meditate; there settle thy account with thy conscience for every past benefit unrequited, every past endearment unregarded, of that departed being who can never, never return to be soothed by thy contrition. If thou hast ever given one unmerited pang to that heart which now lies cold and still, then be sure that every unkind look, every ungracious word, every ungentle action will come thronging back upon thy memory, and knocking dolefully at thy soul Take warning by the bitterness of this thy contrite affliction over the dead, and be more faithful and affectionate in thy duties to the living."—GEOFFREY CRAYON.

THIS was the regular routine of our days when we were alone:—Mrs. Winchester appeared in the drawing-room a little after noon, and I read to her—novels always—till luncheon time, and again after luncheon till the ringing of the dressing-bell. Dinner concluded, the cribbage-board awaited us, and we played from about six o'clock till one, two, or three in the morning, as the case might be. I forgot to say that, the first evening of my arrival, Wingfield made our tea, which we drank without much interruption to the game, and this plan was pursued ever after, to my intense annoyance; for the pouring out of the tea, and the general duties of the urn, would have been a most delightful recreation wherewith to vary the everlasting "fifteen-twos, and fifteen-fours, and his knob, and his heels,

and flushes, and goes," and all the rest of the wonderfully ridiculous terms made use of in the game of cribbage. Before the first week of my residence in Altisbury Close had expired, I hated the very sight of a card. And can it be wondered at, when it is remembered that seven or eight hours out of twenty-four I was occupied entirely with those same stupid little bits of pasteboard, and that I was confined to one game alone? When I was a school-girl I learned that "cards" were invented for the express amusement of Charles VI. of France, during his lucid intervals. I am sure the amusement was quite sufficient to prevent the lucid intervals being anything further than *intervals*, and those of very brief duration. To this day I nauseate cards.

Sometimes we had callers, and then I heard all the scandals of the Close; and sometimes Mrs. Winchester gave evening parties, and we played whist till our tempers would bear it no longer; and then I heard more scandal. It is marvellous to remember what very wicked, deceitful people lived in that fair Cathedral city; the ladies and gentlemen who were Mrs. Winchester's guests were evidently the only persons in the place who had any reputation worth speaking of.

There was a certain Mrs. Mawe who delighted in the exposure of her neighbours' faults. After her revelations, I really felt quite uncomfortable when, on Sundays, I saw in the Cathedral the identical prebends and vicars who lived such scandalous lives;

and, as for the ladies—if Mrs. Mawe might be credited, the greater part of them ought to have been shut up in a penitentiary forthwith. How often, as I sat an unwilling and disgusted listener to stories that I did not, and could not, for a moment believe, and that never ought to have been told, even supposing them to be perfectly true—as I sat dispensing Bohea to the dowagers, and venerable virtuous spinsters, and immaculate old beaux of the Close and its neighbourhood—for we drank tea in state, of course, on company nights, and it was my duty to preside—how often I recalled those lines of Cowper,—

“Of temper as envenomed as an asp,
Censorious, and her every word a wasp;
In faithful memory she records the crimes,
Or real, or fictitious, of the times;
Laughs at the reputations she has torn,
And holds them dangling at arm’s length in scorn.”

I wonder if the bard of Olney ever was present at a whist party in Altisbury Close! The sketch is too faithful to be altogether imaginary.

Card-playing seems, in one of its aspects, to be very nearly akin to drunkenness; for it makes the person absorbed in it quite oblivious of good manners, and altogether regardless of the little complacencies and amenities which the most selfish and surly feel themselves obliged to assume in their intercourse with each other. Mrs. Winchester’s guests used to meet with an excessive demonstration of politeness and mutual regard;—as soon as the tables began to be formed, the first symptoms

of cracks in the varnish might be detected; for there was a good deal of finessing, and no little squabbling, about partners, and *vis-à-vis*. But as the evening drew near its close, all restraint was laid aside: partners abruptly chid each other for being senseless and stupid, and antagonists quarrelled, and magged, and abused each other roundly. O, the faces I have seen over those whist tables in Mrs. Winchester's drawing-room! Eyes full of wrath and spite, mouths working with ill-suppressed rage, features drawn into the type of all that is base and unlovely, voices shrill and keen, words coarse and stinging, and, finally, the ungoverned passion and malice of the defeated party, and the exulting, unconcealed triumph of the winning side. All this, and more, I have seen; and I know now it was no novel picture.

The first time I witnessed this extraordinary phase of polite (?) life, I imagined that something very serious must ensue; and if any one had told me that the same persons would ever assemble again, under the same circumstances, I should have been quite incredulous. Supper, however, healed most of the feuds; Mrs. Winchester's excellent wine and her famous patties restored the belligerent parties to a grim equanimity; and it was very rarely that they separated with less urbanity than was their wont, under ordinary conditions; sometimes, however, deadly feuds, and the most implacable animosity, sprang up out of these whist-party quarrels.

I must, however, say, in justice to Mrs. Winchester,

that she seldom lost her temper with her guests; though after the first few evenings she became extremely acid, if *I* happened to win in succession several games of cribbage. When I found this out, I played ill on purpose: and I was quite distressed if I held a good hand, or if the "turn-up" was in my favour. About one game in six, I permitted myself to win, lest she should complain of monotony; I could easily have won every game, for her memory was so defective, and her sight and arithmetic so imperfect, that only very moderate skill and attention were necessary to carry the day against her; and in cribbage, as in everything else, "practice makes perfect;" and seven or more hours, evening after evening, converted me into a first-rate player of my patroness's favourite game. And so the peace was kept between us; I escaped scolding and grumbling, and Mrs. Winchester was satisfied with her superiority.

And so the days passed on, and cards and novels were my only mental sustentation. Of course I was not happy now; my servitude was utter slavery, and I sometimes thought it would be better to give up my situation, and try Chetwode-street once more. But this was only when I felt furiously exasperated, or fairly worn out; sober reflection always determined me to remain where I was, till some happier alternative presented itself; the bondage and obscurity of home were not to be thought of. But, O! the disgust of life, the weariness of the world, and everybody and everything in it, that I some-

times experienced! Was I never to be even moderately happy? Was disappointment to be always my lot?

I began to think it was so, and that I was doomed to be more unfortunate than other people; and there stole over my heart a sullen apathy, and then arose a fierce resentment against the Providence who had so ordered the circumstances of my lot! I shudder when I look back at that wretched interval of my life, when I was impudently inclined to call God to account for thus dealing with me, His wayward, rebellious child. I sometimes wonder greatly that my heavenly Father had patience with the perversity and obduracy of my long undisciplined, unregenerate nature. If God dealt with us, as we, under our best aspects, are inclined to deal with our fellow-creatures, what would become of us? Truly His thoughts are not our thoughts, nor our ways His ways.

As the spring came on, I was sometimes released from the weary novel-reading; for the daily drives that Mrs. Corder had promised me began to be taken, whenever there was neither rain, nor east wind, nor dust; and the dull drive was quite a delightful variation in the weary monotony of the long day. Once or twice, too, I obtained permission to go to the afternoon service in the Cathedral, and it was a great treat to sit still, under that magnificent roof, and listen to the glorious music, that rose and fell like great waves of celestial harmony, flowing from arch to arch, and from aisle to aisle.

On Sunday mornings I generally went to the Cathedral; but not always, for often it was so late before the Saturday night's game was concluded, that I did not awake till the great bells were chiming for service. The cribbage-board was not brought out on Sunday evenings, lest any one should drop in and find us at play; but the novel-reading went on merrily, and sometimes Mrs. Winchester told me long stories of her youth, of her innumerable lovers, and gave me the full and particular account of her engagement and subsequent marriage with the Dean; when, as report averred, she was really an acknowledged beauty, though already past her first bloom. I forget the tale now; only I remember that the proposal was made—as became a Dean—in the cloisters; and that the wedding was the most splendid ceremony that Altisbury ever witnessed.

But all this Sabbath desecration made me seriously uneasy. Though I knew nothing about vital piety, I had always been taught to make a decided difference between Sundays and other days; and, since the death of my aunt, I had experienced an increase of devotion to the forms of religion, which I dare say I mistook for religion itself: I thought it my duty to go to church, and to read sermons and pious books on the Sabbath-day; and the reading of loose French novels seemed to me equally disreputable and wicked. I was astonished then, and I am more astonished now, at the thoroughly heathen life of the widow of the Dean of Altisbury.

On the second Sunday of my residence in the Close, I asked if she did not generally attend the Cathedral; she replied, "No, my dear, I never go to church." I supposed, then, she went to chapel. "No, indeed! she would like to pull down every chapel to its foundations. She never went anywhere, she had learned all her duty years ago, and churches were always damp or dusty, and sermons were very stupid things, and the prayers the same unvaried tale over and over again. It was all very well for young people to go to church—she had gone quite regularly once a day in the Dean's time—but for persons of her age and experience, it was unnecessary to take so much trouble." Sometimes I asked her if I should not read aloud a chapter in the Bible; I remember thinking it was very good of me to make the proposal; and she generally assented, though with evident reluctance. On the first of these occasions, I opened the sacred volume towards the end—at one of Paul's epistles, I believe—and was proceeding to choose my chapter, when Mrs. Winchester interposed. "No, my dear, don't read from that part; read out of the middle; give me something entertaining."

I obeyed, by reading some narrative—I forget what—from the book of Kings. When I closed the book, my patroness nodded encouragingly, and said, "A very pretty story, my dear; a very pretty story, and very nicely read, too; we will have it again some day." And these remarks, with trifling variations, were repeated whenever we had a reading

of the Holy Scriptures. I never could get her to listen to a chapter from the New Testament; and the Psalms and the prophetical books were similarly rejected. I once read to her the last chapter of Ecclesiastes, and she showed her displeasure in sullen silence for the remainder of the evening, and I was snubbed and worried for several days afterwards.

How wearily that bright spring passed away! how I yearned to see the northern moors bursting into life under the kindling rays of the April sun! How fair and sweet seemed now the old, past-away life at Lunecchester! what would I not have given for one hour of that precious time to come back to me once more! "Come back! come back!" was the wild, ceaseless cry of my desolate, aching heart. I forgot how mingled had been the happiness for whose return I so passionately longed; I forgot how brief had been the joy and the comparative rest of those days: but, shrouded in the soft, sunset-like mist of tender, clinging memories, they were only the fairest colouring; and the shadows and the gloom were lost in the golden light that now flooded all the past.

The weeks passed on, and I grew more weary and more dissatisfied: I think, too, my discontent was not altogether unreasonable: the life I led was not calculated to please anybody who had not settled down into a mere existence of scandal, good-living, inaction, and card-playing. As for the novels, I hated the sight of them: they were all alike; the only variety being from insipid sentimentality to a *piquancy bordering* — nay, frequently arriving at

licentiousness. I began to think the governess-life would be preferable; at least I should have some sensible occupation, and I might be fortunate enough to meet with nice kind-hearted people; and I *might* be able, perhaps, to make the children love me. Any drudgery, any humiliation would be far better than this weary, vapid, stunted vegetation in the Cathedral Close. Sometimes I envied the nurse-maids, whom I saw daily in the broad walks beneath our windows; they chatted with each other, they played with their little charges, they seemed so blithe and gay, under the budding trees, and in the merry sunshine of the pleasant spring mornings. And sometimes I sat and looked at the glorious Cathedral, and its grey cloisters, and envied the dead, who lay there at rest; their sorrows and their joys alike ended, and all the incertitudes of human life for ever passed away.

It was in the early summer that I was roused from the melancholy torpor into which I had fallen. First of all, Mrs. Winchester began to find me a very unsatisfactory companion, and she hinted that she must try to find some one of a more congenial temperament: "she could put up with a great deal," she averred, "no one had fewer whims than herself, and no one could be more considerate; she liked to see everybody comfortable around her: but sullen and brooding natures she could *not* tolerate; my sad face made her quite ill, and then I had become so pale and thin—I was quite a reproach to her."

So one morning towards the end of May, when

she came down and saw the traces of tears on my face, I summoned up courage, and replied to her querulous complaints, by telling her that I was thoroughly wearied of my present mode of life, and that, as soon as she could provide herself with a substitute, I should be glad to leave Altisbury. She was extremely angry, for she knew very well that it would be difficult to find any young person willing to spend her time as I had done for the last four months: while the nieces had enacted companion, I believe, there had been no end of disagreements, and Mrs. Winchester fancied herself the victim of selfish and ungrateful kinsfolk and dependents. But I was not to be moved; even the offer of an addition of £10 to my salary was not sufficiently tempting. I loathed my present life so much that I preferred any drudgery to its continuance: besides, I was losing my good looks, and ruining my health; my bright colour had given place to a sallow paleness, and I was perpetually suffering from headache, and lassitude, and pain in the side. No wonder! sitting up as I did, over the card-table, night after night, till I nearly dropped from my chair through weariness. Late hours inevitably destroy one's bloom, and, what is still more serious, impair one's constitution.

It ended in our sitting down, both of us, to write to Mrs. Corder; Mrs. Winchester to complain, as I afterwards found, of my "insolence, selfishness, idleness, stupidity, and base ingratitude," I to tell her that I could no longer endure the

bondage of my patroness, and to beg her to think of me, should she happen to hear of any one who required a governess.

In due time our answers arrived—what was contained in Mrs. Winchester's epistle I know not, but mine was the bearer of direful tidings. My little brother Fred had been ailing for several days, and his malady had at last been developed into scarlet fever of the most fatal type; they feared also that Bertie was sickening of the same complaint; and my father and mother implored me not to think of coming home till the danger of infection was over.

In another day or two I heard again: the fever was now typhoid, and both children were in imminent danger. The accounts became worse and worse: first of all, the doctor was very much alarmed; then there was little hope; then no hope at all; and then came the mournful tidings that all was over. Fred died first; Bertie survived him but a few hours; and on the day before the double funeral, Harry, my darling brother, who had been away in lodgings since the breaking-out of the fever, was taken violently ill, and brought home to his broken-hearted parents and sisters.

My poor little brothers! how bitterly I regretted every harsh word, every impatient gesture! How guilty I felt, as I recalled the brief period when, as their instructress, I had made their young lives sad! O, the vain, unutterable remorse, that weighs us down when those we love are gone from us for

ever, and we know that we once gave them pain, and clouded their path, and infused gall into the cup of life, that, but for us, might have been so sweet and so pleasant! O, the remorse, that comes all too late; the penitence, that cannot make amends; the regret, that must ever remain! If I had only been there to nurse my little brothers, to sit up with them, and tend them with sisterly care and love; if they had only given "sister Milly" one last look of childish love and confidence, before they went away to the shadowy land, where affection's gentle care is needed no more! But it might not be.

But I resolved that, come what might, I would go home to nurse by brother Harry. I invaded Mrs. Winchester's bed-room at nine o'clock in the morning; I held a parley with her, through closed curtains, and informed her that I must leave Altisbury that very day. I had already packed my things, in anticipation of what that morning's post would bring me. She was very angry, and at first refused to let me depart; but Wingfield unconsciously made a move in my favour, by exclaiming, "Laws! Miss Kendrick, how ill you do look! I hope you mayn't be going to have the fever yourself; I've heard, before now, of infection coming in letters."

That was enough; I was imperatively commanded to retire; my four months' salary was brought to me by the housemaid, who was ordered to do everything to expedite my departure.

I did not see Mrs. Winchester again; by noon I was on the way to the nearest railway station.

CHAPTER XXIII.

VACANT PLACES.

We watched her breathing through the night,
Her breathing soft and low,
As in her breast the wave of life
Kept heaving to and fro.

Our very hopes belied our fears,
Our fears our hopes belied,
We thought her dying when she slept,
And sleeping when she died.

For when the morn came, dim and sad,
And chill with early showers,
Her quiet eyelids closed—she had
Another morn than ours!

THOMAS HOOD.

ONCE more I was on my homeward journey, and the day was fair and bright, as when, two years before, I had left Agenoria House, with such brilliant visions of a future that was to be all sunshine and smooth sailing. How old I felt! Was it possible that I had seen only nineteen midsummers? Long years seemed to have passed over my head since that memorable day when I bade farewell to my governesses. *Nineteen!* I felt more like thirty-nine: more like a middle-aged care-worn woman than a young girl with whom life was just beginning. I was no longer nervous at travelling alone; I had grown accustomed, as the Lunechester people say, to “fending” for myself; and I cared little for the solitary journey that

would have been so formidable to many girls of my age.

But never before had I travelled under such saddening influences. Poverty and reverses had awaited me before, but not death. And when at length, late in the evening, the Paddington station was reached, my heart grew chill within me as I stepped out on the thronged platform and saw no outstretched hand, no welcoming glance, no familiar face.

Of course, I knew that no one was likely to meet me, for I had given no intimation of my return; and had I done so, I doubt if any one could have been spared from the stricken household in Chetwode-street. Nevertheless, when I found myself quite alone in the crowded thoroughfares of London my composure deserted me; and, leaning back in the cab, I wept bitterly, and without restraint. But presently we turned a familiar corner. I knew the locality; and I was sure that a few minutes more would bring me to my destination. So it behoved me to check those floods of tears, and those convulsive sobs; for I must be calm, and not add to the confusion and desolation that so surely awaited me. So I wiped away my tears, and summoned all my courage, knowing well how greatly it would be needed. A few more turns, and we were in Chetwode-street.

I sprang out, and paid the cabman in less time than one generally takes to think about it; for, arrived at the scene of action, I felt like one distracted, so impatient *was I to stand by my brother's bedside.*

A woman, whom I did not know, opened the door—Prissy had been sent that very day to the feverward of the hospital—and I rushed by her, and into the little parlour, hoping to find one of my sisters there. The room, however, was empty, though the tea-tray was on the table, with cups and plates, both dirty and clean, as if the family were taking the meal how and when they could; and some old black garments, in process of reparation, were thrown carelessly over the arm of the sofa.

While I stood hesitating what I should do next, I heard Mrs. Corder's voice on the stairs, saying, "Bring up the tea-pot, Mrs. Sanders; I want a cup of tea, and there is not a minute to spare. But what is all this? where do these come from?" She had just seen my boxes, which Mrs. Sanders and the cabman had piled up in the passage.

In another moment she stood before me, crying, "Child! child! what made you do this? Do you know you are come to a house where there is death in the very air you breathe? Why did you not stay at Altisbury, as I bade you?"

I told her that at such a distance from home life was insupportable, that I *must* nurse my brother, whatever might be the consequences; and that no mandate on earth could have kept me from his side. I eagerly inquired how he was, and whether the danger was very imminent. She had no good news for me. Harry was violently delirious, and the fever had not reached its height. Rose and Susan were both worn out, and my mother seemed

altogether incapable of action. Perhaps, after all, it was for the best I had come.

"Yes, indeed!" I replied fervently. And I would have gone up stairs immediately; but Mrs. Corder wisely prevented me, remarking that I need not expose myself to unnecessary risks, and that I should be far more likely to take the fever if I entered the sick room fasting, wearied, and trembling with excitement. There was so much sense in this that I consented at once to wait awhile; and in the mean time Mrs. Corder went to tell my sisters that I had arrived. Susan soon came down; and, throwing her arms round me, gave way to a flood of tears. She was evidently worn out, and unable any longer to control herself. After awhile, however, she became calmer, and we sat down to tea together, and she told me all the sad circumstances of the illness and death of the twins, who had been laid in the grave that very morning, and all the particulars of Harry's seizure. I could see that she entertained but very faint hopes of his recovery. As for Mrs. Corder, she had been invaluable—a ministering angel in the midst of their extremity. My father had begged her to leave the house; but she made answer that "she would not desert any one in the time of need; neither would she carry infection elsewhere; there might be risk, but, under any circumstances, the path of duty was the path of safety." So she remained, and both Rose and Susan averred that, without her, their distress would have been infinitely greater; for she had shared all their watching and their

labour, and was the only person who seemed to have the slightest influence over our poor mother, who had fallen into a state of the most pitiable despondency. And this was the person whom, at one time, I had very nearly hated, and would have given all I possessed to banish from our midst. Short-sighted, foolish creatures that we are; and I beyond all others.

I was painfully startled when I saw my mother. Years rather than months seemed to have elapsed since we parted with renewed hope in January. Every trace of youth and comeliness had fled: she was a haggard, decrepit old woman. She had exerted herself wonderfully during the dear children's illness: day and night she had watched by them, and administered every draught and every cordial with her own hand; but when the last twin died, with his little drooping head on her bosom, all her energies seemed to be expended. As I have said before, she was not formed to cope with difficulties, and every sorrow left its indelible trace on her heart, on her intellect, and on her constitution. If adversity and death had never visited her household I think she might have lived to old age, as happy and blooming and good-tempered a wife and mother as ever existed. But it was not to be. From the hour when my father proclaimed himself a ruined man she had been gradually declining, both physically and mentally; and now the shock of the death of her darlings, the twin boys, of whom she had been so proud, her last-born babes, and the

solace of her misfortunes, was too great for her feeble nature to sustain. When the dead child was taken from her arms she sank into a state of listless sadness that was infinitely more alarming than the wildest exhibition of the most ungoverned grief. Even Harry's seizure did not rouse her. She went once or twice, at the instance of Mrs. Corder, to his room, but she only gazed at him with a mournful, dreamy sadness, that seemed to say hope was finally extinguished. She stood awhile, neither speaking nor moving, and then turned away, and retreated to her own room, whence no persuasion could induce her to remove. She did not seem at all surprised when, quite unannounced, I entered her presence. She returned my kiss, as it were, mechanically, and without a word: then she began to weep very quietly. I saw at once that her heart was broken: every emotion, save passive, hopeless wretchedness, had passed away. My poor, poor mother! How I wished then, and afterwards, that I had never been impatient with her; that I had borne cheerfully her little whims and caprices, and the fretfulness and irritation that change of circumstances had wrought upon her once calm and even temper.

Harry was, indeed, delirious: he did not know me in the least. When the doctor came that evening it was easy to perceive that, though he wished to cheer us, he had no real encouragement to give; and when Mrs. Corder asked him if the bad symptoms were abating he ominously shook his head. I strove to prepare myself for the worst.

And the worst soon came. I will not linger on this sad chapter in our family history. Even now, as I write, the darkness of those terrible days of suspense and agony comes back again. Suffice it to say that I lost my eldest brother, and that he knew me before he died, and that we bade each other a long farewell. How I longed to die also! I would have given worlds to have shared his grave.

Then Rose was attacked; and we began to think that each one, in turn, would be swept away by this fell, relentless fever. But our Heavenly Father, in His mercy, staid the progress of the disease: the virulence of the malady seemed exhausted, and Rose did not suffer nearly so much as her brothers. A short time of anxiety passed, and then she began to mend. Susan and my father escaped with such slight attacks that, had the fever not been in the house, we should have treated them only for sore-throat and feverish cold. Mrs. Corder and myself suffered from no indisposition save occasional languor and headache.

When the autumn came we were all tolerably well again, except my mother, who was evidently sinking fast. She had no particular disease, but she declined rapidly, becoming weaker day by day. She was very quiet and patient, lying still hour after hour, never speaking unless spoken to, and never interested in anything that passed. We thought she liked to hear Susan read the Bible and repeat hymns; but we were not sure. I thought the mere monotony of sound soothed her. I was wrong: the Word was doing its silent but appointed work.

One evening we were all three sitting in her room, when my father came in with a huge bunch of chinas and other autumnal flowers, that some one had given him. He laid them down before her, and she smiled faintly, and put out her trembling hand as if to draw them nearer. It was the first smile I had seen on her face since our happy Ferndown days. I thought how very weak she seemed that night, and yet she said a few words to him, and seemed pleased when he kissed her and wheeled her chair nearer the fire. The tears rose unbidden to my eyes as I surveyed my parents: the one so unmistakeably passing away from the things of time; the other so grey, and worn, and prematurely aged. They were sitting together side by side, as I had often seen them in earlier and brighter days. It was the last time I ever saw them thus.

My mother, for the first time since the children's death, spoke of several things concerning family interests, concluding by saying, "You will have more time, my dears, ~~when~~ I am gone." A look of intense pain crossed my father's face. Notwithstanding the shadows that had risen up between them, very, very dear to his heart was the long-loved wife of his youth.

"You are not going yet," he said, as decisively as if the emphatic utterance of his desire would have settled the matter.

"Yes, I am," she replied: "and, O! my dear husband, I am very glad: I am of no use to any one. I *want to go to my boys*; and I am very,

very tired—so tired—O! so tired! And I am not afraid of dying.”

“No, indeed! There is no reason why you should be,” said my father, choking down his strong emotion. “Nobody ever lived a more blameless life than you, my poor Mary!”

“It’s not that, not that,” she replied; “it’s the Blood that takes away all sin that I trust to. Susan has read all about it; I knew it before, but I never understood it; but now I do understand and feel it, it makes me very happy. If I had lived—I don’t know—it is best as it is: I always was a poor creature, good for nothing when the sun went behind a cloud; only a trouble now, when I ought to be the head and helper. O! it is much better that I should go. And I am so weary, I long to be at rest; and there is One who has said, ‘I will give you rest.’ Even a poor, useless, sinful thing like me may go to Him.”

I saw Susan’s face light up with something that was almost rapture. She had hoped, and prayed, and longed; but, till that hour, she did not know that the victory was won. As she told me afterwards, the sense of coming bereavement vanished under that great joy; in the calm beauty of the sunset she looked beyond the approaching night of death to the morning of reunion in the world beyond the grave.

None of us, however, dreamed that the hour of release was so close at hand.

“At midnight came the cry,
To meet thy Lord prepare!”

Yes, at midnight my father called us, saying that the end was coming. We ran down to my mother's room, where Mrs. Corder was already, and she lifted her finger as we entered, bidding us not disturb that sacred stillness. The decay of nature was quiet to the very last: she breathed on through the night, till the morning broke, and then respiration became fainter and fainter, till it ceased. There was not a sigh or a struggle; all was peace; she was at rest, and we were motherless, and my father widowed.

We laid her in the cemetery by the side of her children, and then we had to turn back to life, and consider our prospects for the future. Mrs. Corder went for a month to Ramsgate, and she insisted on taking Rose with her; so for some weeks my father and Susan and I were left alone in the half-empty house. How desolate it was without those ringing, childish voices, and Harry's manly tones, and without that pale fading figure, with folded hands, and half-closed eyes, resting day after day on the sofa, drawn up to the fire-place, all through the early part of that sad, sad autumn! And Rose too, and Mrs. Corder, were greatly missed; and we longed for the time fixed for their return.

They came back in the first week of October. Rose had quite recovered her health and her good looks; indeed, I had never seen her so blooming since she quitted Radenham; evidently, sea-air agreed with her. I thought, too, she was, in some way or other, inexplicably changed; she looked happier, and yet graver; more like our "bonnie Rose"

of Ferndown, and yet older and more thoughtful than when she went away with her thin face, and her colourless cheeks. Soon after supper she disappeared, and I was about to follow, when Mrs. Corder came in, and said she wanted to say a few words to us all together; and so we drew our chairs anew into the circle, and prepared to listen.

"How do you think Rosy looks?" was Mrs. Corder's first question.

"Very well, indeed," replied my father; "marvellously improved, thanks to your kindness: sea-air has wrought wonders. I am thinking if I cannot manage to send Milly and Sue down just for a few days."

"I doubt whether sea-air would be equally efficacious in their case," returned Mrs. Corder, drily; "indeed, I am not sure whether it would be desirable."

My father looked puzzled; then a little alarmed: he was very nervous about his surviving children; and the idea flashed across his mind that Rose's renewed bloom might be the treacherous precursor of consumptive symptoms. Mrs. Corder saw that his apprehensions were excited, and she hastened to allay his fears.

"Don't be frightened," she said; "there is nothing to be alarmed about; the child is really quite strong again, and may live, please God, to be a great-grandmother; but something has happened that will vex me if it should happen to vex you;—the long and the short of it is, Rose has been and fallen

in love; or, rather, to speak more properly, she has been fallen in love with, and reciprocates the sentiment."

"Well, who is it? how did it happen?" inquired my father, breathlessly. Susan and I looked our intense curiosity. Mrs. Corder replied—

"It happened on this wise, Mr. Kendrick :—I found at Ramsgate an old friend and his wife and family; we were well pleased to see each other again, and we spent a great part of every day in each other's society—I chatting over by-gone times with the old people, and Rose, as was natural, consorting with the young folk.

"Young Mr. Ravenel and his sister both took a great fancy to Rose, and before we came away it seems the young man's fancy grew into something deeper and more decided—he asked her to be his wife. Reference was made to me, as the young lady's temporary guardian, and I told my friends exactly what I thought of the matter, and how Rose was circumstanced, having neither any fortune, nor, as far as I knew, any expectations. To this my friends, Mr. and Mrs. Ravenel, replied that money was a minor consideration; William would have plenty of his own, and need not seek wealth with his wife. They liked Rose very much; they were pleased with her manners, and felt sure she was a genuine good girl; and if William wanted her they would gladly give their sanction to the match, and receive her with pleasure as their daughter."

"Well, if they do not object, and if you think it

is for Rosy's happiness, I am sure I shall not say no," said my father, looking very much pleased.

"I do think it is for Rosy's happiness and welfare," returned Mrs. Corder; "there is only one drawback—it is necessary that William Ravenel should speedily leave England for Australia; business demands his presence there for a longer or shorter time, and he will want to take his wife with him."

"That cannot be," said my father shortly; "I cannot part with my child—I cannot let her go out of the country. The young man must choose between his bride and the Australian expedition."

"I do not think he has the power of choice; he is bound to go to Australia, and to remain there for a period not exceeding five years, probably not more than three years. Now, Mr. Kendrick, this is an excellent match for your daughter; William Ravenel is an excellent young man, he has a fine disposition, a refined taste, and he is able to marry and maintain a wife comfortably, and one day he will be a rich man. If anything should happen to you, how thankful you would feel that one of your daughters was well married and settled!"

"But Australia is so far," pleaded my father, "and Rosy is so young—only eighteen."

"But as steady and sensible as twenty-eight. And long engagements are always to be avoided; if you let him go without Rosy, because you cannot make up your mind to a temporary separation, the child will pine, and you will be sorry for it."

"Well," said my father, "let us see the young man first."

"Surely," replied Mrs. Corder, "it need not be settled to-night. William will be here to-morrow to talk to you."

And on the morrow William came, and he and my father talked it over, and Rosy was called in; and then the elder Ravenels were consulted, and Mrs. Corder questioned by both sides, and finally the engagement was concluded, and on the following Sunday the lovers walked to church, arm in arm, as demurely and naturally as if they had been married for half-a-dozen years. And so our bonnie Rose was promised in marriage to William Ravenel.

CHAPTER XXIV.

OUR BRIDE.

With fadeless flowers and gentle dews,
And verdant, never-dying hues,
The earth's first bowers were decked ;
And there, ere sin or error came,
Leading the way for woe and shame—
Ere human hopes were wrecked—
God formed and blessed the holy marriage-tie,
While yet the world was bright in purity.

Sacred Year.

VERY soon after Christmas our Rosy was married. Of course, the wedding was strictly private, on account of our late bereavement; and on a rather humble scale, on account of our straitened circumstances: indeed, if Mrs. Corder had not been most generous, I know not how my sister's *trousseau* would have been provided; for Christmas brought us in several heavy bills, necessarily contracted through the sickness and death that had lingered so long over our household; and the money I had received from Mrs. Winchester went to purchase suitable mourning for myself and my sisters, all save one solitary note, that I kept for any exigency that might arise.

The Ravenels would have made a sumptuous entertainment at their own expense, for they had plenty of money, and were lavish in their expenditure; and they tried to persuade Rose to be married from their house, but, of course we could not listen to any such

proposal. Poor as we were, the honest pride of independence was inherent in our family. We had not the heart, however, to refuse Mrs. Corder's kindness, especially as much of it consisted in contriving and working like a paid sempstress on my sister's behalf; though, at the same time, she brought out from her stores pieces of costly lace, and lengths of delicate muslin, that would have ravished the heart of Mrs. Winchester had she happened to behold them.

Rose looked very fair and sweet on her wedding morning. Her beautiful veil, which Mr. Ravenel insisted on presenting, fell round her slender figure like a filmy cloud, and the sun shone brightly on her auburn ringlets, as, leaning on her father's arm, she walked up the aisle of the musty, sombre city church, where she was to become the wife of William Ravenel. It was the first wedding I had ever witnessed; and, as I listened to the solemn vows exchanged by the young bride and her husband, I wondered how any one could enter hastily and thoughtlessly on such serious and sacred responsibilities. I had frequently heard love and courtship treated as a jest; the very mention of an impending, or even a probable, marriage being sufficient to provoke bantering remarks, and trifling satire, most annoying to the parties concerned, and by no means creditable to the perpetrators of the senseless joke. Why people in general should conspire to hold the high and holy estate of matrimony as a fit theme for ridicule and fun, I cannot conceive. They seem

to forget its most holy origin. They certainly are not aware that it is "an honourable estate, instituted of God in the time of man's innocency, signifying unto us the mystical union that is betwixt Christ and His Church."

People *profess* to believe this; and yet, in all grades of society, jests, varying from the most graceful *badinage* to the coarsest irony, are ever rife when matrimony becomes the subject of discourse. Children in tunics and short frocks are teased about their little sweethearts; young maidens and beardless youths, whose energies ought to be concentrated on their tasks, are rallied about their flirtations and incipient engagements; a promise of marriage becomes to them merely an amusing pastime; and even men and women, when arrived at a suitable age for this solemn union, are made the butt of ridicule, which, however kindly and witty, degrades that upon which it is expended. If young people were taught the sanctity and the holy beauty of the blessed marriage-tie, would there be so many unhappy marriages—so many disgraceful disclosures of family histories and private scandals? May not the fault I have mentioned be at the root of one of the saddest evils of our social system? May it not be the first taint that induces the fatal plague-spot of this our beloved and glorious land of England? Our grandmothers made the opposite mistake: young women in the middle and higher classes were bred up with conventual strictness; allusions to the masculine gender were sternly prohibited; no young lady

was ever supposed to be thinking even remotely of any gentleman till he actually and formally proposed, and the subsequent engagement was carried on to its completion with all gravity, and the most delicate, not to say prudish, reserve. That such a system was faulty is self-evident; but the other extreme into which we, of this generation, have rushed is certainly far more open to objection. In our day children in the nursery are encouraged to discuss their beaux, and their "little wives;" and young ladies of seventeen are allowed by their mothers to own to several engagements, and hint at innumerable flirtations besides. If love and marriage were rightly and *Scripturally*—with all purity, reverence, and dignity—considered in the process of education, would our Divorce Courts be so heavily burdened, so inundated with their disgraceful business? And still further, *would the streets of our great towns be what they are?* It is a good work to build "homes" and "refuges," and to contribute to their support: nay! it is more than a good work—it is an imperative duty, seeing that society requires it;—but is it not something like building fever-hospitals, and, at the same time, neglecting all sanitary precautions in our streets, and in our private dwellings? Surely this is a question deserving our most serious consideration.

But I am wandering far away from my story, and from my sister's wedding morning. It was soon over; the irrevocable words were spoken: those whom God had *joined together* might no man put asunder.

Henceforth, Rose Ravenel must leave her father's house, and all kindred ties, and cleave to her husband, for better and for worse, for richer and for poorer, in sickness and in health; to love, cherish, and to obey, till death should dissolve the solemn union there and then ratified. We went home rather sadly; even the brow of the young bride was overshadowed, for the prospect of parting was near at hand.

And in a few days the parting came, and we bade farewell to Rose and her husband as they stood together on the deck of the noble vessel that was to convey them to that far-off Australian shore. We lingered till the last moment; and, looking back, we saw Rose weeping in her husband's arms, yet clinging to him as if her home and her chief joy must be ever by his side.

"Ah!" said my father, as he dashed away the tears that well-nigh blinded him, "my bonnie Rose has been the best of daughters; and she will be a good, true wife!" And Mrs. Ravenel staid her weeping, to say that William was a happy man, for he had found the treasure that Solomon says is of price "far above rubies."

Every moment the waves broadened between us; and, when we reached land, the good ship looked like a child's toy on the wild waste of heaving, darkening waters; but on her track rested a glory like molten gold, for the broad, red beams of the afternoon sun were glowing on the bosom of the black, restless waves; and they seemed to follow

the vessel that was "outward bound," that English sunshine might be with her to the last—to-morrow morning she would be far away on the great sea. We were all inclined to take that sunset splendour as a harbinger of good. I dare say it was a superstition; but it encouraged us, and we felt far happier than if we had lost our beloved ones in the brumous fog that prevails so much at this season of the year, and especially at the hour when day declines into evening.

Then we came back to London, and night found us gathered once more in diminished circle round the fire-place in our own little parlour, in Chetwode-street. From the period of Rose's engagement, up to the time of her marriage and departure, we had felt in some sort unsettled: we had it in our minds to make some few changes, but anything definite had been invariably postponed till the wedding was over. Now it behoved us to make the long-delayed arrangements.

We all thought our health suffered from our town residence; indeed, for many months past the bills of mortality for our district had been unusually heavy, and our own severe bereavements confirmed us in the belief, that we should do better not to spend another summer in our present residence. We thought we could find a small pleasant house, not too expensive, somewhere in the suburbs; and Mrs. Corder, who was still to be our inmate, volunteered to go with me on an exploring expedition. We agreed, too, that in a more genteel neighbourhood Susan would be able

to take morning pupils on far better terms than was possible in our present locality; and, as she now observed, she was qualified to announce herself as "a lady accustomed to tuition;" moreover, having attained the mature age of seventeen, and flattering herself that she might be taken for twenty-seven, no one could possibly object to her youth, as had been the case at the commencement of her governess career.

As for myself, I had determined to try another situation: if Susan took pupils at home, I should not be wanted, for Mrs. Corder never now confined herself to her own apartments, and my father would be engaged in business from morning till night, and only be at home on Sundays. Moreover, my funds were rapidly diminishing; I had only just enough left to pay for an advertisement or two, and for any journey that I might be obliged to take in proceeding to the scene of my future labours. So my mind was made up: I would assist in the forthcoming "fitting," see Susan comfortably installed as mistress of the new house, and then answer any advertisement that seemed promising; or, if that failed, advertise myself in several of the leading papers; and I carefully laid aside one sovereign from my little stock of wealth to pay the necessary expenses. Mrs. Corder and I had many a weary walk before we could find "a tenement" to our minds. Houses to let there were in abundance; most desirable dwellings, roomy and commodious, with coach-house, stabling, and well-stocked gardens; gems of cottages, highly-finished

baby-houses, with tiny verandahs, French windows, miniature lawns, and greenhouses about the size of a Wardian case. Then there were newly-finished villas of modern architecture, with handsome drawing-rooms, scarcity of bed-rooms, and total deficiency of closets, to say nothing of want of accommodation in the kitchen, cellar, and pantry departments. We certainly were not limited as to choice, only all the nice, convenient houses were high-rented, and our income was as unelastic as it was circumscribed.

What we wanted was a plain commodious dwelling, with airy bed-rooms, and one good-sized parlour where Susan might receive her pupils, a light kitchen with plenty of cupboards, a humble scullery, and a tight little garden all to ourselves. And for these accommodations we wished to give—I will not say how much rent—anybody who has just £130 per annum at command, and no more, can imagine how much we wished to place in our landlord's hands, when the inexorable quarter-day came round.

Day after day we went forth on our vocation, we looked diligently into the papers, we asked everybody if they knew of a good cheap house to be let, or if they knew anybody who was likely to possess such knowledge; we wore out our shoes, we broke our clogs—the era of goloshes had not then risen; we made our umbrellas shabby; we splashed our dresses; we brought home on the hems of our garments heavy specimens of the soil whereon we had sought in vain for a dwelling place; we took cold; we got very tired; we grew very cross!

At last, one bright February morning, when the treacherous winter seemed actually on the point of abdicating in favour of an early spring, we set out for a last attempt. Susan was with us, for the family of six to whom she ought to have been imparting the rudiments of the French language, at eighteenpence an hour, were seized that morning with indisposition, or idleness, or something or other that luckily freed their "French governess," as the *materfamilias* of the six young ladies pompously called poor Susy, from the necessity of giving the customary three hours' lesson—I am afraid, though, Susan was mulcted that week in the sum of four-and-sixpence—and accordingly, to our great satisfaction, she volunteered to help in house-hunting; so we equipped ourselves with all haste, and leaving Prissy's successor to take care of all our worldly goods, and boil the potatoes for my father's dinner, we turned our backs on Chetwode-street, and set out in an entirely new direction. We went in an omnibus, as far as it would carry us, and then, invigorated by the soft breeze, and the sunshine, and the novelty of dry roads, we posted along so briskly that we were very soon in a pleasant region, where there were lanes, and gardens, and the bonniest little houses imaginable. But, alas! they were all occupied, and we were turning away when we bethought ourselves of making inquiries at a baker's shop we were passing, and there we learnt that in another lane there were two houses to be let, rent and capabilities unknown.

The first was a very fine likely-looking tenement, and in the garden the snow-drops were already peeping out. Susan went into raptures on the spot, and *hoped* the rent was low. Vain hope! the house, on being inspected, contained luxuries and grandeurs we had long forsworn—that is to say, they had forsworn us; and the rent was £90 a-year! It might as well have been £900.

Then we went to the other house, which the baker's wife had said "might be had cheap, she should think. It stood in a garden—a garden that had once been gay with flowers, and choice shrubs, and rich in fruit-trees and vegetables. The house looked as if nobody had lived in it for half a century; and the whole place wore an air of desolation and abandonment; it had evidently been unoccupied for a very long time. We had called for the keys, as we were directed at the baker's; but no one volunteered to go with us to show the house; so we turned the key in the entrance door, and went in by ourselves. It was a wonderful house. It was old-fashioned, but roomy, and replete with conveniences. Two large parlours, and a little one; delightful kitchens, closets, and cupboards, and shelves, and pegs in every available corner, and a handsome stone staircase. *If* it were really cheap, what a treasure it would be! And though so near London that my father could easily walk to and fro, morning and night, it seemed miles and miles away in the country: in the summer that winding lane would be a perfect bower of verdure, and those trees would echo with a concert of song. *It was*

dreadfully out of repair, though—I mean the house, not the lane—and it needed mending, and papering, and painting, from the top to the bottom. We were coming away, half sanguine, half doubting, when we encountered an elderly gentleman, who, hat in hand, announced himself as the landlord. He had heard that ladies were looking over “Myrtle Cottage”—what a sweet name!—and he came to see if it approved itself to their ideas. The first question was the rent. He named a sum so ridiculously small, that I believe we were all ill-bred enough to stare; Susan said afterwards, the surprise nearly made her scream. Would he put it in repair? Yes; if we would take it, the carpenters should come in to-morrow, and painters and paper-hangers should succeed them in due season. Mrs. Corder objected to the grate in the best parlour—a new one should be substituted, of our own choosing. Did the chimneys smoke? Certainly not; but they could be tried, and altered, if necessary, before we came in. Was it damp? Oh, no—merely damp as any house shut up through the winter must be. Was the water good? Excellent; no better within fifty miles. But the state of the garden—it had run to ruin. Ah, well, the landlord would see to that; it should be laid out afresh. In short, the landlord would do anything and everything, and he wanted to settle the question on the spot. However, we delayed our answer till the morrow, because it was requisite to consult my father; and, full of hope, we went back to Chetwode-street.

My father took a half-holiday next day ; went out to Myrtle Cottage, saw the landlord, made divers business-like stipulations, exchanged references, *and took the house*. Myrtle Cottage was ours ; the rent to commence at the ensuing Lady-day. A week afterward, as we were returning from the cottage, after making some necessary measurements, we heard some children say, in an awed tone :—" Them's the ladies as 'ave taken the '*auunted* 'ouse."

Here, then, was the secret of our low rent. On inquiry we found that no one had lived in Myrtle Cottage for fifteen years, because it had an evil name ; and the last tenants, as well as their predecessors, had been driven out by uncanny noises and strange appearances.

Nevertheless, we stuck to our bargain ; we thought it so good a one that we determined to contend possession with the ghosts. They never gave us the chance ; we came into Myrtle Cottage a week before quarter-day, and though many years have passed since then—and my father and Mrs. Corder live there still—I am bound to say that the excitement of any kind of supernatural visitation never occurred.

Once only, the nerves of our maid-servant were shaken : one dusky evening she saw in the hall a huge black cat, with fiery eyes, which she was sure "was not what it seemed to be." As the spectral Grimalkin appeared to no one else, and as it never came again, we were not in a position to disprove her statement.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE PEPPER FAMILY.

Wanted, a governess, well-fitted to fill
The post of tuition with competent skill:
As the salary's moderate, none need apply
Who more on that score than on comfort rely.

AND so we bade farewell to Chetwode-street, and not without many tears. The house looked dingier and meaner than ever when all the furniture was taken out; and the kitchen, bereft of its cheery blaze, and its shining tins, seemed a veritable den of darkness; for the day of our removal was marked by one of those dense, close, chocolate-coloured fogs for which our metropolis is so celebrated. But, nevertheless, those dreary, dusky rooms were hallowed by many sacred memories; there was the place where my mother's chair had always stood; there the spot where we had gathered round her dying bed; there was the mark on the wall where Harry's book-case used to hang, and there, on the wainscot, sundry marks and indentations, the work of little hands now quietly folded in the grave. All these things were to us now as some hallowed shrine to the devout pilgrim; and we were leaving them and looking at them for the last time; to-morrow strangers would be in our place, and every trace of that sad, yet precious, past would be ruthlessly swept away. A few days found

us comfortably settled in Myrtle Cottage; a few more found Susan busily canvassing for pupils in the new neighbourhood, and yet a little longer and I drew up my first advertisement and sent it to the *Times* office; it ran thus:—"A lady accustomed to tuition"—had I not taught my little brothers once upon a time; and had I not given an occasional lesson for Susan?—"wishes to meet with a situation in a nobleman's or gentleman's family, where the children are not under ten years of age. She undertakes

impart a thorough and finished English education; also the French, Italian, and German languages, with Latin and the rudiments of Greek. Also drawing in various styles, music and singing, and ornamental needlework." What a catalogue of acquirements! How well it read! Surely, my only difficulty would be to choose from the large number who would be desirous of engaging so valuable a governess.

I expected that next day's post would bring me an avalanche of answers. The postman came indeed, and there were several letters for Mrs. Corder, and one for Susan, from her old friend Annie Cooper, of Radenham, and one of extraordinary dimensions and aspect for our little maid-of-all-work, but nothing for me. I turned them all over and over again, convinced that there must be some unaccountable mistake: that splendid advertisement could never have failed! Then I thought how foolish I was to think of failure because the first post brought no answers. I must wait till later in the day, perhaps even till *to-morrow*. I did wait till *to-morrow*;

and another and another to-morrow went and came, and the week glided away, and no one took any notice of "the lady accustomed to tuition." Then it occurred to me that my advertisement was overlooked among so many others: the very multiplicity of advertisements seemed to me to defeat their own ends. I would try one of the smaller papers, where there was at the most a column or two of "wanting situations." But then if there were fewer advertisements there were also fewer readers: it was very puzzling to know how to act for the best.

I concluded to try the *Morning Post*, and again my attempt was vain; I had, indeed, one answer from a lady in Yorkshire with a family of nine children, six in the schoolroom; and who offered me twenty-five pounds per annum, washing included; on the score of not requiring, for the present, some of the branches of education to which I expressed myself competent. I scornfully tore up Mrs. Grindall's significant epistle, and committed it to the flames.

Once more Mrs. Corder was my good genius: she was one of those who count it a part of their religion to take in the *Record*, and, like many others, who cannot afford the entire expense of the paper, she clubbed with two friends, who duly passed it from hand to hand; the paper being the property of the last reader. I do believe Mrs. Corder would as soon have staid away from church as have left the week's *Records* unread, and she was very particular about their being taken to her the moment they arrived. One afternoon the *Record* arrived accord-

ing to custom, and I immediately carried it up to Mrs. Corder, who was sitting by her bed-room fire; I lingered a minute, looking over the fancy knitting in which she had been engaged, and was about to go down again, when she cried, "Millicent, here it is! the very thing for you." I rushed to her side in a moment and read the paragraph to which she pointed. It was an advertisement *for* a governess, and it *was* "the very thing." It might have been an answer to mine, the advertiser requiring exactly what I was able to give.

I lost no time in writing to "P. Q. X., Westminster," and all next day I was in a state of anxious and almost sickening suspense—would the following morning bring an answer from P. Q. X.? was I too late? The *Record* was three days old when it reached me. Why was it not cheaper, that all its readers might have it first-hand direct from the publisher's office? My fears were groundless; next morning by the early post came a missive from Westminster. P. Q. X., alias Mrs. Pepper, would be glad to see Miss Kendrick that day, at two o'clock.

Mrs. Corder kindly offered to accompany me; she had business in the City, and she did not like the idea of my appearing before the redoubtable Mrs. Pepper without a *chaperon*. So we arranged matters, and took the omnibus that crossed the top of our lane, and in due time found ourselves standing before a grave, handsome-looking house, in one of the quieter streets of Westminster. The very scraper was imposing, the front door looked quite too grand

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to be opened to poor governesses in search of a situation; and the bell when gently pulled did not ring after the natural habit of bells, but tolled a solemn intimation of our arrival.

A superb-looking footman opened the door, and most superciliously marshalled us up-stairs into the back drawing-room, where there were chairs that seemed intended for anything rather than sitting upon; footstools too magnificent for feet to touch; books too splendid to be opened, save on company nights; and a grand pianoforte that seemed far too huge for a single performer. We waited here, till I was thoroughly nervous, and Mrs. Corder thoroughly indignant. "We were punctual to the moment; why did not Mrs. Pepper keep the assignation made to suit her own convenience?" At length the lady made her appearance, a really fine-looking woman in elegant morning costume. Her tone was cold, her manner business-like, her face when speaking was certainly handsome, though there was an occasional flash of the eye that looked ominous, and her features when in repose were disfigured by an expression that looked terribly like a chronic sneer. She opened the conversation.

"Your name is Millicent Kendrick?"

"It is, ma'am."

"How old are you?"

"Twenty in a few weeks."

"Very young, sadly *too* young. If I engage you, you must call yourself five-and-twenty. This person is your mother, I suppose?"

Mrs. Corder was not accustomed to hearing herself specified as a "person," and she replied, stiffly enough, "Miss Kendrick has unfortunately lost her mother—I am merely her friend."

Mrs. Pepper scanned me from head to foot; probably my mourning garb corroborated Mrs. Corder's assertion. She continued, "Are you an orphan?"

"No, ma'am; my father is still living."

"What is his business?"

I told her, adding that he had been unfortunate three years before, and was still in very straitened circumstances.

"So far, so good," replied Mrs. Pepper; "I prefer a governess of reduced family; those young people who are brought up to the trade are generally in the lower ranks of life. Have you any brothers?"

"Not *now*." Do what I would, I could not keep the tears out of my eyes; they swelled there in spite of every effort, and fell in large drops on my black dress.

Mrs. Corder again interposed: "Miss Kendrick's brothers died some months ago, not long before their mother; she has two sisters, one married and living abroad, and one younger than herself, who keeps house at home." Mrs. Corder thought that, by volunteering information, she could put aside the catechetical, not to say inquisitorial, character of the interview; but Mrs. Pepper instantly returned to the charge—"Are you engaged?"

"Certainly not," I replied; "I would not have

given you the trouble of making these inquiries, had I any other situation in view."

"I do not mean that; are you engaged to be married—have you a lover?"

As I answered in the negative, remembering Sir Rowland Lindale, and my palmy Luncechester days, the proud blood rose to my cheeks, and my face grew crimson under the scrutinizing gaze of Mrs. Pepper; for it seemed terribly like a maid-of-all-work being asked whether she had a *beau*; and I wondered whether a governess was also disqualified for "followers."

"I wish she were engaged," broke in Mrs. Corder; "I have no opinion of this governessing; it is hard work at the best, and little one gets for it, living out of sight of everybody, and running the chance of being an old maid."

Mrs. Pepper would have looked surprised, if she had ever been surprised at anything; but she only looked disgusted, and went on,—"That, too, is all very well; my last governess was engaged, and used to waste her time—*my* time, rather—in writing twice a-week to her intended; I resolved never again to have a love-sick girl in my house; indeed, your own sense must tell you that any kind of courtship is quite incompatible with the duties of a governess. Your whole time, and energies, and interests ought to be bestowed on your pupils; all your hopes, and wishes, and aims ought to centre in their advancement. Have you been abroad?"

Of course I said I had not; and this seemed at first

a very serious obstacle; but true Parisian French was less common then than now; and when I remarked that I had always learnt French from a Parisienne, Mrs. Pepper's scruples were mitigated, and she thought that might answer the purpose. Had I any of my drawings with me? No; that was really unlucky, and inconsiderate on my part; it was so easy to carry a small portfolio of specimens! Well, of course I could play without notes; there was the piano—would I sit down, and give an idea of my style?

Of course there was nothing for it, but to comply; and while I opened the huge, French-polished machine, and adjusted the music-stool, Mrs. Pepper summoned her eldest daughter, whose education was already completed, to judge of my performance. Miss Pepper ought to have been a very pretty girl; she had fine eyes, regular features, and a faultless complexion: she was dressed, too, with admirable taste, and her hair, rich and abundant, was becomingly arranged. But pretty she was not, save in her own and her mother's eyes, for the censoriousness of her disposition was impressed on her features, and the sneer, that was only perceptible on her mother's countenance, was unmistakeable on the fair face of the daughter. There was something hard, too, in her expression, something at once reserved and haughty, quite out of keeping with the innocent age of eighteen; and then, the lower part of her face was out of proportion with the upper part; the brow, the eyes, the nose were perfect; but the cheeks and the chin were too long, and the lips

too expressive of self-complacency, and contempt for all opinions that were adverse to her own.

As I sat down, I looked at my audience: Mrs. Corder was of no importance; but which of all my pieces should I choose, in order to impress Mrs. and Miss Pepper with a solemn sense of my musical capabilities? Happily, some instinct led me aright; I divined that neither mother nor daughter had any true music in their souls, and that what made the most noise, and required the greatest mechanical skill, would please them best. So I selected a great, crashing "*Fantasia*," full of chromatic scales, and runs, from one end of the instrument to the other; I played whole handfuls of *arpeggio* chords, rushed from key to key, from major to minor; I shook, I turned; I growled the air in the lowest bass; I trilled it forth in the topmost treble; I gave it *andante* and *cantabile*, I gave it *prestissimo* and *furioso*; and, last of all, I flew up the board in double octaves, and down again in *fortissimo* chords, struck a final *tremando* with both hands, and, last of all, the key-note with a decision worthy of a military band.

I was rewarded: Miss Pepper still looked stony, but the sneer was hardly discernible. Mrs. Pepper said, "You play extremely well, Miss Kendrick." There was a little more conversation, and Mrs. Pepper—very unreasonably I thought then, reasonably I think now—was quite taken aback when she discovered that I had been accustomed only to the tuition of my little brothers; I really feared the negotiation was going to break down straightway,

but good Mrs. Corder put in her word again, and proposed a trial of three months, which would do no great harm either way; and so it was agreed upon, and I was engaged to instruct the three younger Misses Pepper, at a salary of forty pounds; it would have been fifty, but for the unavoidable misfortune of my youth and inexperience.

That day week I was standing again before Mrs. Pepper's front door; but no Mrs. Corder was there to cheer and to encourage me. The stately footman again made his appearance; but this time he did not convey me up-stairs: he shouted, in a key which led me to imagine that Mrs. Pepper was from home—to some one in the lower regions—"I say, just lend a hand here, and show the new governess to the school-room." The person thus addressed made a grumbling reply, and I heard the words—"Can't you show her yourself? I s'pose you know the way."

"S'pose I do," was the rejoinder, spoken *sotto voce* in a stage-aside over the bannisters, "but it's none of my business to wait on the *other* upper servants."

I was beginning to rage within myself when a buxom housemaid, duster in hand, made her appearance, and, with a civil curtesy, invited me to follow her up-stairs. Not to the back drawing-room this time, but to a higher story; and on the upper landing we paused, and the girl said—"Miss Kendrick, ma'am, isn't it?" and threw open the door, and announced my arrival to the inmates of the room.

These were my three pupils—Miss Selina, Miss Lettice, and Miss Adelaide Pepper; three haughty, sour-looking girls, from twelve to sixteen years of age. Selina came forward and accosted me with a mingled air of indifference and patronage, and offered to lead me to my room, which offer I as indifferently accepted. A quarter of an hour afterwards the tea-bell rang, and I was summoned to the school-room; Selina was already at the head of the table.

I felt that now or never was my time; I must assume my proper place and authority, or be content to struggle for it afterwards with little hope of success. So I quietly passed by a vacant chair, and said to my eldest pupil, "Will you let me take my seat?" The young lady started, coloured, and scowled, but rose nevertheless, and took the chair which had been left for me. Adelaide called out rudely, "Selina always made tea in Miss Meek's time." "But I am Miss Kendrick, and not Miss Meek," I said, as pleasantly as I could, "and this is my proper place."

It was miserable tea, worse than any we had re-galed ourselves with in Chetwode-street; and the bread was stale, and the butter briny, with a flavour of horring. The young ladies grumbled freely, and Lettice seemed to take it very hard, when the fumes of the late dinner found their way up to their secluded sanctum. "I know there's green pea-soup, and I do so love it," she said, with a genuine pathos that made her sisters laugh, and grow quite parious over their weak tea and "mild Dorset."

Presently they went to dress for the evening; there was company, and they were going down to dessert, and afterwards into the drawing-room for an hour or so. I took advantage of their absence to arrange my property in my new quarters; and about half-past eight, when my pupils returned, I read prayers in the school-room, saw them go through their calisthenic exercises in their dressing-gowns, and gladly dismissed them to their bedrooms. Half an hour afterwards I performed the final duty of the day by taking away their candle, and I sat down by the smouldering fire to think what my father, and Susan, and Mrs. Corder were doing at Myrtle Cottage, and to wish I were with them once more. The Pepper family and the Pepper mansion did not impress me favourably.

CHAPTER XXVI.

OPENING THE CAMPAIGN.

The hint malevolent, the look oblique,
The obvious satire, or implied dislike:
The sneer equivocal, the harsh reply,
And all the cruel language of the eye;
The artful injury, whose venom'd dart
Scarce wounds the hearing, while it stabs the heart;
The guarded phrase, whose meaning kills; yet told,
The listener wonders that you thought it cold—
These, and a thousand griefs minute as these,
Corrode our comfort, and destroy our ease.

HANNAH MORE.

It was a bright spring morning when I first opened my eyes in the topmost story of Mrs. Pepper's house. I sprang up refreshed and strengthened, quite ready to do battle with any opposing forces that might be awaiting me in the region of the school-room, and anxious to open the inevitable and fast-approaching campaign of governess troubles and responsibilities. As I dressed, and looked from my window upon the vast prospect of roofs and chimneys, varied only by a stray spire or two, that looked very like ships sailing in the middle of a meadow, the question arose in my mind whether or not there was any Mr. Pepper. I argued that there could not be such a person, for Mrs. Pepper had engaged me, settled the question of stipend, and dilated upon her views respecting the future of her dear girls, without the

slightest reference to marital authority. She also said, in the course of conversation, "*my* house," "*my* dinner-parties," "*my* circle," &c., always the first person, sharply and definitely pronounced: "*egomet*," rather than "*ego*," being the chief characteristic of every sentence. Then at tea-time on the previous evening the young ladies had referred to "*mamma*," and to their eldest sister, Emilia; but never to "*papa*," either as past or present. Clearly, according to the most obvious logical deductions, Mr. Pepper must have been gathered to his fathers at some remote period of the family history, and consequently Mrs. Pepper was a perfectly consoled widow. That she had sons as well as daughters, I was quite aware, for my pupils had talked largely and rather braggingly among themselves about "*Gus*" and "*Dolph*," who were at Oxford, deeply engrossed with boat-racing, dog-training, cricket-playing, and other arduous duties of university life. I supposed that these young gentlemen were christened Augustus and Adolphus, and I argued from the simple fact of their college residence that they must be the elder branch of the family.

It was seven o'clock, and Mrs. Pepper had told me that at that hour the studies of the day were supposed to commence. I hurried therefore to the school-room, and felt both relieved and annoyed to find it empty. I sat down and looked around me; seen by day-light the apartment seemed nearly as dingy and mean as those in which I had lived so long in Chetwode-street, and untidiness as well as

CHAPTER XXVI.

THE PEPPER CAMPAIGN.

The sun illumined the dark valleys,
The morning mist in vapour faded;
The earth quivered, the world quaked,
And all the great language of the eye;
The world's injury, whose wounded dart
Scars wounds the living, while it stabs the heart;
The parried pain, whose meaning kills; yet told,
The inner wounds that you thought is cold—
There, and a thousand grinds minute as those,
Control our conduct, and destroy our ease.

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in that unenviable position—seeking a situation. Yes, I made up my mind to all kinds of hits, and rubs, and angles, and roughnesses; and I sought to clothe myself in a certain thick-skinned stolidity that should baffle any attempt to drive me forth by mere dint of opposition, innuendo, or petty persecution. But as I sat musing, and putting on my armour, both offensive and defensive—O, what a wretched panoply it was!—I bethought myself that my pupils must be hurried, or on me might fall the censure of idleness and want of punctuality.

I went to their bed-room—a story lower than mine, and level with the school-room—and, lo! there were the three young ladies still wrapped in balmy slumbers. They were soon, however, aroused; and they commenced their respective toilets with great ill-humour, for I insisted upon seeing every bed vacant before I left the chamber; and they one and all declared that Miss Meek never said anything if they were ready for Scripture lessons, ten minutes before breakfast. I urged Mrs. Pepper's own statement, and her actual command, that *at seven o'clock* the duties of the day should commence. They laughed at this; and Selina said—"Now don't be tiresome, Miss Kendrick; you just give us our mark for punctuality, and mamma will never know anything about the time you or we make our appearance in the school-room. She and Emilia are never visible before ten or eleven o'clock—they go their way, and we manage to go ours. I dare say you don't like turning out these chilly spring morn-

shabbiness prevailed everywhere. Was I to vegetate there continually? Was I to sit during school-hours and at meal-times in that ancient, uncompromising chair, with the hard horse-hair seat, at the head of that indented and ink-stained table? And was I to solace myself in the evenings with a lounge in that forlorn-looking rocking-chair, with consumptive cushions? Yes, I saw my life before me; dreary days in that dreary school-room, solitary nights in the back attic, enlivened, however, by the sound of gossip and unsuppressed laughter in the room of my neighbours, the house-maid and kitchen-maid; going to church on Sundays, taking a constitutional with my pupils in St. James's-park on other days, and sometimes perhaps entrusted with a commission that would carry me into Regent-street or the Strand.

There I sat, contemplating my probable future with anything but complacency; but yet—

“Like some bold seer in a trance,
Seeing all his own mischance
With a glassy countenance”—

did I look—not to Camelot, certainly, but to Westminster, as the arena whereon I was to play out for some months, at least—perhaps years—the drama of my life; and I looked unshrinkingly. It is perfectly true that “a rolling stone gathers no moss;” and I knew it, and believed it; and I determined to brave all annoyances, and submit to many indignities, and to put forth every energy in order to please my patroness, rather than again find myself

in that unenviable position—seeking a situation. Yes, I made up my mind to all kinds of hits, and rubs, and angles, and roughnesses; and I sought to clothe myself in a certain thick-skinned stolidity that should baffle any attempt to drive me forth by mere dint of opposition, innuendo, or petty persecution. But as I sat musing, and putting on my armour, both offensive and defensive—O, what a wretched panoply it was!—I bethought myself that my pupils must be hurried, or on me might fall the censure of idleness and want of punctuality.

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ings any better than we do, and you need not do it. Only keep the mark-book straight, and leave facts alone."

I felt rather disconcerted; for Selina spoke with the authority of an elder and a superior, and with all the policy and decision of a woman of the world, and I was just at that age when impertinence and annoyance from a junior are most unendurable. My offended dignity prompted a resentful reply: but I had the wisdom not to open the first day with altercation, and I quietly made answer that I was not responsible for Miss Meek's conduct, and I did not wish to copy it; most certainly I should not think of making false entries in the mark-books; I would not deceive their mamma, or assist them in doing so. Whereat Selina and Lettice were silent, and looked their scorn and exceeding disgust. Adelaide made a face, of which lady-like proceeding I thought it best, under the circumstances, to take no notice. I left the room, merely saying that I should expect them in a quarter of an hour; and as I closed the door I heard Selina mutter, "*Quelle bête!*" and Lettice responded, savagely, "Stupid, ugly creature!" They came in a few minutes before breakfast, and sullenly produced their Bibles. Without any preludeing remark they opened the Sacred Volume somewhere in Kings, and began a chapter; I stopped Selina, before she could read her verse, by saying that I wished them to read in the New Testament, and I would trouble her to begin the opening chapter of St. John's Gospel. She appeared to hesitate,

and the sisters exchanged a glance, which seemed to say—"Shall it be open war or not?" Apparently they decided in favour of present submission, and the chapter was gone through as carelessly and quickly as can be imagined.

I am ashamed to say that I made this alteration merely to show my authority; they might have read anything from Genesis to Revelation for aught I cared; but I thought, if I interfered, it would testify to my independent and determined spirit; and I fancied that every time I succeeded in exacting obedience, I gained so much vantage-ground. I was partly right, and partly wrong, and more the latter than the former, because I made a point of enforcing my will on every occasion, simply from the desire of gaining my point; and I often thwarted these naturally-wayward girls, when they might have been safely left to their own guidance: I teased them about trifles, and took great pleasure in doing everything in determinate opposition to the system of my predecessor, who seemed most rightly named.

Oh, I shall never forget that day! I had to discover what my pupils actually knew, and very hard and irritating work it was—quite as irritating to them as to me. Confident in my own superior attainments, I had very little mercy on their blunders and their most provoking *insouciance* "Don't know;" and I expressed myself very freely on the subject of their ignorance and want of sagacity. I said nothing absolutely rude or harsh; but I remarked on their failures with a covert acrimony and a *stinging*, though refined, irony, that must have

pained and exasperated minds far more docile and placid than those which I was now to take under my supervision.

I had been thought a witty girl in my school-days; the propensity for quizzing was rather fostered during my prosperous career at Lunechester; and while at Altisbury, my powers of sarcasm, though outwardly repressed, reached their full development. A keen sense of all that was weak, ignorant, contemptible, ridiculous, and self-assuming in those around me was a natural part of my temperament. I could no more help seeing and understanding the follies and pretences of others, than I could help beholding their countenances with my eyes open. Keen perceptions are a gift, undoubtedly, but joined to unlimited sarcasm, they become almost, if not quite, a curse. As, during my intercourse with the Pepper girls, their natures and mine—all, alas! totally unregenerate—became necessarily developed; as our antagonistic points became more and more clearly defined, I made use of the weapons in my armoury with very little reserve, and without any scruple; and yet I never said anything that would not pass current in polite society. I will not inflict these passages of arms on my readers; they are not worth recording, unless it were to show in what poison and gall an educated woman of satirical powers, without the restraining influence of Christian principle, can dip the barbed arrows that are pointed with an unerring aim against the unfortunates who are doomed to receive the cruel, lacerating shaft, and to endure, for many a day, the rankling and the burning pain

of a wound which pride forbids them to discover. My pupils were intractable, self-willed, arrogant girls, with a firm persuasion that everything pertaining to them must be, and was, of the best, and grandest. They literally adored their own position; and whatever came into their possession instantly assumed a value far beyond its intrinsic or extrinsic merits. There were no drawing-rooms in Westminster like theirs; no dresses so elegant and so good as theirs; no equipage but what in some points was far inferior to theirs; no girl so admired and so courted in society as their sister Emilia; and actually no governess—hateful as she was—so clever and so thoroughly the lady as theirs. An intense self-consciousness, and self-importance, and self-assertion pervaded the whole family—all but one member of it, whom I will mention presently—and it may be imagined how this family foible furnished me with a never-failing source of pungent satire. When I was insulted, or thwarted, or defied, or sent to Coventry by my pupils, my revenge was always prompt and sure, and they writhed under it to my intense satisfaction. By dinner-time that first day, I had taken my stand. Selina, who was to learn everything, and to finish her education in another year, seemed to have made a hash of all her learning; her history, geography, languages, and *sciences* were a regular lobsouse of information, a kind of intellectual hot-pot, or Irish stew, compounded by many cooks. She had learned heaps of facts, thousands of words; but she had never been taught to reason, to synchronize, to make distinctions, or to arrange; her mass of knowledge was worse than

useless; it was deceptive, and confusing. No portion of it was available or forthcoming when required. Lettice—a tall, heavy girl of fourteen, with a slightly aquiline nose, and a stern aspect—looked me unflinchingly in the face at every interrogation, and declared that she knew nothing about it. I saw that in her there was more perverseness than ignorance; she had a better capacity than Selina, and she could distinguish facts and their sequences, and even theorize, in a blundering fashion, whenever she chose to exert herself. As for Adelaide, she put Peter the Great, and Louis the Fourteenth, and Ahab, among the kings of England; she called “because” a common noun—though, as she declared, she had gone seven times through Murray’s small, and once through his large grammar. She placed the river Volga in South America, and called Ispahan the capital of Brazil! Finally, when, looking over some books of poetry, that had been used in Miss Meek’s time, and in contemptuous scorn of her complacent stupidity, I asked her who wrote “*Young’s Night Thoughts*,” she coolly replied, without a moment’s hesitation, “Dr. Watts;” and seeing, from the derisive smile on my face, and from the broad grin on her sisters’, that she had made some ridiculous mistake, she cried out that it was Sir Walter Scott.

I could not help recalling the silly and irreverent riddle about the paternity of Zebedee’s children. But the child saw that I despised her, and she was confirmed in her rudeness and malevolence.

After dinner we took a walk, and my pupils did not deign to converse with me. I addressed them

in French, as Mrs. Pepper had desired that we should speak that language in the hours between breakfast and tea-time. Lettice and Adelaide were sullenly silent; Selina pertly replied that she could not tell what I said, my accent was so strange.

In the evening, when I was hoping for a little quiet time to read or think, Selina came up from the drawing-room, with her mamma's compliments, and she would thank me to come down and play a set of quadrilles: Emilia had some young friends, and they wanted to dance. I looked at my plain merino dress—my pupils were in white muslin and green ribbons—Selina said, "It does not much matter what you have on, no one ever takes any notice of the governess; you can go away the moment we have done dancing, unless mamma wants you to sing and to talk to some stupid person; but I think you had better make yourself a little more presentable."

Upon this hint I felt obliged to act; and, running up to my room, I soon returned in my black silk, with clean collar and cuffs, and one of the brooches that my dear Aunt Ryland had given me. Selina had gone, so I had to make my way downstairs by myself. When I reached the first floor landing, I could hear much gay laughter and chat going on in the drawing-room, and I knew that a large party must be assembled. I felt at first very much abashed at the idea of entering the room unaccompanied and unannounced, but a moment's reflection convinced me that of all things nervousness and shyness were most out of place in a governess.

If I were timid I should be awkward, and that I did not wish; so I mustered all my courage, and boldly opened the door and walked in. It was rather a trying ordeal for one in my position, for I could not see either Mrs. Pepper or her daughters at first; but I retained my self-possession, and I walked across the room as proudly as I had ever crossed those far more splendid, and far more thronged rooms at Lunchester, in the bright, brief days of my supposed heiress-ship.

The pianoforte was vacant: I took my seat and looked unconcernedly around me; I saw Emilia gazing at me in unfeigned astonishment, and, without appearing to notice her surprise, I said, "What music do you wish, Miss Pepper?"

"What can you play?" was the rejoinder.

"Anything," was my answer.

"Oh, very well," replied Emilia, "here is a splendid set, just come out, only a little difficult."

She put them before me with a smile that I was at no loss to interpret, when I looked at the music I was desired to play. I had never seen such elaborate dance-music; it would require practice and great skill and taste to play them with anything like effect. I perceived that my discomfiture was counted on; but I was not to be daunted thus.

"Pretty airs," I said carelessly to Emilia, who was still standing near me; "I am ready if the dancers are."

"Ah! you know them," she said, with such an air of undisguised disappointment, that I could not quite restrain a smile.

"No, I never saw them before, I only recognize the leading themes; but there is never much in this sort of music."

I played my very best, and where I felt that I could not venture on a first reading, I improvised, and no one knew that I had departed from the text. The dancers were delighted; "I marked the time so perfectly, I played with so much spirit, it was as good as a band." Then Mrs. Pepper was asked if I could sing, and as she was asked by a person to whom she was always, on good principle, winning and complaisant, she referred the question to me, and I sang one of my favourite ballads in my very best style. Decidedly my first appearance in the Pepper drawing-room was a success.

I was going away presently, when an elderly gentleman, of benign aspect, said to me, "You play very nicely, Miss Kendrick, very well indeed; I hope you will make my little girls as nimble with their fingers; I should think, too, Emilia might take an occasional lesson." I was so surprised that I asked to whom I had the pleasure of speaking.

He burst into a hearty laugh, and exclaimed, "Bless my heart and soul; to think you don't know me! Why, I am the master of the house, and the papa of your interesting charges, and I am glad to see you, and dare say we shall get on capitally! Can you make cigarettes, eh?"

So there was a Mr. Pepper after all; but I was not so sure whether he was what he asserted, the master of the house.

CHAPTER XXVII.

MR. PEPPER'S INDISCRETION.

Alas! for the pitiful mushroom-pride
That seeks its lowly source to hide!
That would bury out of sight and mind
The business it deems so unrefined!
Foolish woman! contemptible man!
Prove your gentility if ye can—
But not by being ashamed of that
Which has made you rich as an aristocrat.
GOD blessed the labour of your hands;
Thank Him, who gave you house and lands:
And what He gave He may take away;
Thou may'st sink to the dust in a single day.

No! Mr. Pepper was not master of his own house: Mrs. Pepper was at the head of affairs; she was Queen Regnant, not Queen Consort; and the fair Emilia enacted Princess Royal as naturally as if she had been born to it.

By-and-by I learnt something of the Pepper antecedents. There was a time—of course, very remote—when Mr. Pepper had stood behind a counter, weighing out ounces of tobacco, and pounds of sugar, and pints of split peas, in a modest shop in the suburbs, and when Mrs. Pepper, newly married, did not disdain to serve her husband's customers with her own fair hands. And *now*—now the very same Mrs. Pepper removed her two younger girls from a dancing-school in the neighbourhood, because they were learning the polka and the cellarius in the

contaminating society of tradesmen's daughters. And she sedulously cultivated an intimacy with all persons who were supposed to be of patrician origin. Emilia's dearest friend was a certain Lady Baynes, a young and fashionable widow; and I was frequently entertained with *piquant* stories relative to a delightful Lord James Brazenby, and an Honourable John Fleece, bosom friends of those redoubtable Oxonians, Gus and Dolph. O, how I despised all those Pepper people, with their purse-pride, and their ridiculous airs of pretension; how I scorned Emilia's fineladyism; and how I sneered, sometimes covertly and sometimes overtly, at the snobbish notions of my pupils! I was the wrong person in the wrong place; for, with my views and sentiments, it was impossible that I could be of the slightest use to these arrogant, *parvenue* girls. They saw that I had a tone and a manner superior to their own; and they saw, too, that I was well aware of this, and that in my heart I regarded their grandeur and their affectation of refinement with unmitigated contempt. Of course they hated me accordingly.

It is impossible not to despise vulgar assumption; but I fell into the not uncommon error of despising the persons of the assumers, forgetting that, in the case of the younger members of the family, assumption was as natural as breathing. They had been born to it, and bred in it, and they could no more help their foolish, arrogant conceit than they could help having brown hair, or being born to the name of Pepper. A wiser, kinder person than myself might

have counteracted the evils of foolish parental influence, and that without exposing the parent to contempt, or attacking the prejudices or misconceptions in which they had been nursed; but by showing them, in word and deed, "a more excellent way."

I must do myself the justice to remark that I did not despise the Peppers, because once upon a time they had retailed the necessities of life across the counter. How could I? I was a tradesman's daughter myself; and I hold honest trade to be as honourable, ay, and as noble, as any other engagement of life, whether it be literary, professional, or senatorial. Let labour always assert her own inherent dignity; let no one be ashamed of working for his or her living in that station to which it has pleased God to call him. What I despised was the pretension, which affected to look down upon trade as upon something wherewith heart and hands were necessarily defiled; and that pretension displayed by the very people who owed their present affluence to industrious toil, and to one or two lucky hits in commercial speculation.

I learnt all this when I paid my first visit to Myrtle Cottage, Mrs. Corder having encountered some poor relations of the Westminster Peppers, who, on their part, thoroughly ignored these Chelsea Peppers, and having heard from them much of the previous history of my patroness and her husband. Whether she acted wisely in imparting to me these particulars I leave my readers to judge. Mrs. Corder was a sensible woman; but on this occasion I think she

departed from her ordinary sagacity and characteristic prudence.

However, I should have heard the tale had she been most discreetly silent. Strange to say, the revelation came from Mr. Pepper himself. He was a plain, straightforward man, and always, as it would seem, retained a hankering after his old shop-keeping life, when he and his Sarah Anne, *alias* Sally, used to drink tea so cozily in a little room at the back of the shop, drawing aside the curtain that shrouded the lower part of the half-glass door, in order that the apprentice might not feel himself at liberty to forego his duties. He only half liked the grandeur in which he lived; and he had little in common with the gay and semi-aristocratic circle which his wife and daughter had drawn around him. Good, easy man, he did as he was told. His was not a nature to struggle with adverse influences; and, for the sake of peace, he was content to carry on an existence wholly foreign to his tastes and long-cherished habits. So he laid aside his dearly-beloved pipe, and resorted to cigars and cigarettes. He consented to drink wines whose names he could never pronounce, on condition of enjoying his own private glass of port, with a crust of bread and cheese, in the morning; but he never could achieve managing his sole or turbot with a silver fork and a piece of bread, much to the disgust of his daughters, who, however, used their knives for other purposes than cutting, without compunction, when they were dining alone with me in the school-room. I remem-

ber how pleased I was when, one day, Lettice gashed her lip so severely that her pudding had to be postponed for some hours; and with what infinite satisfaction I informed her that knives had but one duty, and that was *to cut*.

Now, Mr. Pepper had one habit, that sometimes produced curious and annoying consequences. Like an obedient husband, and dutiful father, as he was, he never made reference to those long-departed days; so dear to his memory, so hateful to that of his lady and her daughters; but sometimes his matutinal glass of port became a bottle, and on such occasions he used to emerge from his study—as his smoking-room was called—in a most inconvenient state of communicativeness, and brimming over with reminiscences of his happy, unpretending, money-getting, Chelsea life. One day it fell out that we were together in the dining-room—Mrs. and Miss Pepper, my pupils, and myself. An act of the domestic parliament had decreed that lessons should be forthwith abolished till a certain quantity of fancy work intended to grace the stall of Miss Pepper at an approaching bazaar should be fully completed. Of course, my services were required, and I gave them willingly enough. It was something to be exempted for a whole week from that weary teaching. It was far easier to manipulate canvas, Berlin wool, floss silk, chenille, seed beads, and card-board, than to impart a thorough knowledge of English literature, and the elements of geology—on which Mrs. Pepper laid particular stress,

and regarding which I was myself in a state of the profoundest mystification—to the pert, sullen Selina. Well, as I said before, we were all seated round the great dining-table, which was covered with the usual litter of fancy work, when Mr. Pepper walked in, rubbing his hands, and looking extremely elate. I saw at once that there had been an undue consumption of port wine. He seated himself between his two youngest daughters, and began to criticise their work; and from that he proceeded to admire a large piece of crochet work, or knitting, I forget which, on which Mrs. Pepper was engaged, the pattern being entirely original, and designed by herself. So far all went well; the criticisms, though jocular, were favourable, and the admiration was lavish. But presently he struck a key that discomposed the nerves of his wife; for with an expression and tone half-pathetic and half-triumphant, and with which she was unhappily too familiar, he suddenly began, turning to me:—

“Ah! Miss Kendrick! five-and-twenty years ago, Mrs. Pepper used to do something more useful than these fine fal-de-rals and fancy-fair flummeries. I am afraid, now, Emmy and Selly could not make a button-hole, or mend a worsted stocking, to save their lives.”

“There is no occasion that we should, papa,” interrupted Miss Pepper, with considerable acerbity; “every station has its duties, and ours are not to sew button-holes, or to mend old stockings.”

“I should hope not, indeed,” chimed in Selina,

with a toss of her head. Mrs. Pepper looked disturbed, or, to speak more correctly, perturbed in spirit; she dreaded what was coming. I wonder she had not the generalship to find some pretext for sending me out of the room.

Mr. Pepper proceeded:—"Ah! those were happy days, when all's said and done; you and I were never better off, Sally, than when we kept the little shop in Carlisle-street. Ah! it's all swept away now—the very street itself is gone."

There was a dead silence. Out of sheer pity, I bent over the scroll I was working, and avoided meeting any one's glance. I knew that Emilia was crimson, and that Selina was ashy pale, and that Lettice was staring widely at her rash and indiscreet papa.

Again Mr. Pepper spoke, and this time he addressed me:—"Now, Miss Kendrick, in me you see an example of what industry, patience, and perseverance may effect. Here I am to-day, a richer man than many of the Earls, and Marquises, and Right Honourables, that are bowling about in the park there, in carriages that they have never paid for. Here I am with everything handsome about me, and ready money down for every loaf of bread, and every pound of butcher's meat that comes into the house—ay, and for every pot of blacking, and every door-mat, and every stick and stump there is, from the attic to the cellar. Now, thirty years ago, I began in the general provision line, with borrowed money, and one tidy suit of clothes. I was careful and thrifty, and in five years I had

paid back the cash, capital and interest agreed upon, to the uttermost farthing. Then I began to think about getting married; I could afford it, and I looked out for a pretty, sensible lass, that would be a help-meet, as the Bible says, and I found one; and we worked away hand-in-hand, and everything prospered, and my money kept doubling and doubling; and I went into the wholesale trade, and took up the shipping interest, and every year I realized more and more. And presently, thinks I to myself, 'I'll do as my wife wishes, and give up the business, and I'll invest;' and I did it, and I got in with Government affairs, in the £ s. d. line, you know,—and here I am, Miss Kendrick, as well-to-do a man as any in Westminster."

"I wish you would not talk such nonsense, Mr. Pepper," interposed poor Mrs. Pepper, as soon as her loquacious lord and master stopped to recover breath. "Do you think Miss Kendrick cares to listen to such foolishness? Of course she sees you have had too much wine, and are not responsible for what you say."

"My dear," returned Mr. Pepper, with emphasis, "it is *not* nonsense. I always make a point of narrating my history to young people; it may do Miss Kendrick good to see how I sprung from nothing, and what I am now. I am not ashamed of what I was, thank God! I don't care who knows that I once wore an apron, and cleaned my own shop windows, and carried out my own parcels, when business hours were over. All the more credit

to myself, I say, though my wife, and little Emmy there, seem to be of a different opinion."

The tears were literally standing in Mrs. Pepper's eyes, and Emilia looked as if she really needed a smelling-bottle and sal-volatile.

He proceeded—"I can't think what ails you, Sally, about old times; I love to think about and talk about them; it does me good, and it keeps the pride down in you girls. Ah, dear me! why, I can see the old place now, as plain as if we had only left it yesterday. I can see the two bow windows—the old-fashioned kind, you know, small panes, and plenty of them; no plate glass in those days, no capital spent in putting out showy fronts, and such nonsense. There was 'John Pepper,' over the door in large gilt letters on a blue ground, and over one window was 'Flour and Provision Dealer,' and over the other, 'Grocer and Drysalter.' And there was a sign on the hay-loft hard by—for I dealt in hay and straw, and horse's corn, and so forth—'John Pepper, Dealer in Horse Corn, Sharps, and Bran.' By-and-by, I did a little perfumery, hair-oil, and—"

"For mercy's sake, Mr. Pepper, be quiet," cried the much-enduring Mrs. Pepper; "you'll drive me mad! I wonder you are not ashamed of yourself. If you must get intoxicated, and tell such dreadful stories, pray choose a time when only your own family are present; do you not see, the girls are quite upset with your nonsense? Miss Kendrick, I trust you will never speak of this unfortunate

conversation, or refer to Mr. Pepper's disgraceful habit of drinking more wine that is consistent with the character of a gentleman; you see, wine acts upon him in a peculiar way—it renders him so talkative, that he really is not responsible for what he says; indeed, he tells such stories so often, that I really believe he imagines them to be the truth.”

I remembered the old trite saying that “children, simpletons, and tipsy men speak the truth.” I made no reply, but Mrs. Pepper saw that she had failed in making the impression she desired. She saw that I firmly believed every word that her vexatiously communicative husband had been uttering; as indeed I should have done had I not received prior information from Mrs. Corder. Mr. Pepper's statements, despite his elevated condition, bore the unmistakeable aspect of truth.

From that day I knew that Mrs. Pepper wished to get rid of me; and yet, remembering the fatal knowledge I possessed, she preferred doing it handsomely, and with an appearance of kindness. I saw that I could leave, and, at the same time, obtain excellent testimonials. So I resolved that I would take advantage of the first opportunity that presented itself; and in the mean time my pupils treated me with additional reserve, albeit there was a shyness in their manner towards me, and a thorough cessation of airs of grandeur, bragging, and talking for effect in my presence.

In the month of July, Gus and Dolph returned

home; they had left Oxford several weeks before in order to pay a visit at the family seat of one of their most distinguished friends. These young men were, on the whole, better specimens than I had expected; they were far less tainted with pretension than the other members of their family; perhaps acquaintance with the world had convinced them of the futility and absurdity of that weak and arrogant self-assertion in which they had been brought up. They were lively young men, full of chatter and nonsense, and much handsomer than their sisters, because they possessed all their advantages of face and feature, without the half-stern, half-sullen expression, and the ever-recurring sneer that so fatally disfigured the girls of the house of Pepper.

Too lively and too friendly I soon found them; they evidently thought a governess the most convenient person to talk to and joke with when they had nothing better to do; and before the first week of their vacation had come to an end, they had fallen into the habit of joining us at the school-room tea-table. I was so cold and reserved at these times, that I am sure I made myself infinitely disagreeable; and yet they remained, and came evening after evening, to my no small annoyance. What could I do? Certainly there was no reason why brothers and sisters should not sit familiarly together; and it seemed terribly like vanity and conceit to imagine that I was in the slightest degree the magnet that drew them to partake of our very

frugal repast. The number of cups of weak tea that those two young men swallowed was astonishing; even now I marvel whenever I recall their extraordinary capacity. Talk of women being fond of tea!—their fondness is not to be compared with that of the sterner sex when they do happen to like it. Witness Dr. Johnson and his seventeenth cup—witness those well-known lines,—

“O, hear it then, my Benny dear,
Nor hear it with a frown;
You cannot make the tea so fast
As I can gulp it down.”

But Gus, or, to speak more correctly, Mr. Augustus, the heir of the house, soon began to give me more trouble than his brother. He brought me choice bouquets, which I always placed on the school-room chimney-piece, for the benefit of the public; he brought me books which I had no time to read; he met me continually when I was walking with his sisters; he insinuated delicate compliments, and, at last, after many ineffectual attempts, he one day surprised me alone in the school-room, and presented a gorgeous bracelet for my acceptance.

Of course I absolutely refused, and he retired deeply chagrined; and then I determined to remain no longer in my present situation. I knew that Augustus was only amusing himself with me, very innocently, as he imagined; and I was not disposed to afford any young man, even were he of the blood-royal, such equivocal amusement. Neither, had he *been in earnest*, was I prepared to receive

attentions favourably: an alliance with the Peppers, and their pretensions, and vulgar pride, was not to be thought of. No, the niece—the adopted child of Alice Ryland could not stoop to that.

Very quickly I saw that I was watched; that Mrs. Pepper was uneasy, the girls suspicious and disposed to lay traps; Emilia more haughty than she had been since the memorable day of disclosures in the dining-room. I went one day into Mrs. Pepper's own room, when I knew she was there alone, and, without assigning any reason, told her that I wished to leave Westminster. She seemed very much relieved, and her manner was infinitely gracious; she made no inquiries, but merely said I could go whenever I liked; she had made up her mind to send the girls to a select school, they wanted a change, &c., &c.; but I might rely upon her for such credentials as should enable me to make any engagement that I thought fit.

In a fortnight I went back to Myrtle Cottage. It was now the beginning of September, and Mr. Pepper insisted on making me a handsome present, over and above my salary. Kind-hearted man! with all his want of perception, and his occasional weakness for port wine, his was the finest, because the most genuine, character in the house. He was not ashamed of his origin; he bore his riches and his position meekly; and his only pride was an honest glorification of his early industry and self-denial. I could not but respect John Pepper, Gentleman, as he was called on several official occasions.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

CLARE GREEN HALL.

What is this passing scene?
A peevish April day!
A little sun, a little rain,
And then night sweeps along the plain,
And all things fade away.
Man (soon discussed)
Yields up his trust—
And all his hopes and fears lie with him in the dust.

H. KIRKE WHITE.

ONCE more I was at home again, and I found things there in a more prosperous state than they had been for several years. My father, through the intervention of some of his old creditors who thoroughly appreciated his honourable conduct in the matter of his bankruptcy, had obtained a pleasanter and more lucrative situation. His hours of business now were from ten to five, and his salary was nearly half as much again as it had been before; he was looking better and younger, and his countenance was gradually losing the anxious, wearied expression it had worn ever since that sad day, when the failure of the Radenham Bank was made public. Susan was a great favourite in her new neighbourhood; she had quite as many pupils as she wished, and the promise of two little girls from India, who were to come to her after Christmas, and reside alto-

gether at Myrtle Cottage. It was evident that Susie was gradually laying the foundation of a prosperous boarding-school; and Mrs. Corder looked on with extreme satisfaction, finding great pleasure in visiting the school-room, and sometimes taking a class in history or geography, when Susan seemed rather overburdened with business. She liked the work, and performed it with a thoroughness and a spirit that proved her capacity for teaching. Then her presence in the house was an advantage; her superior age, and her matronly prefix, gave a stability to the establishment, which Susan's youthful appearance might have led some persons to suspect; and oh! how *I* once had hated and despised this kind and well-tried friend! If ever there was "blessing in disguise," it was the necessity which had reduced my mother to letting lodgings.

I did not tarry long at home this time: I had learnt the ways of the world during my Westminster sojourn, and especially the ways of the governess world; and I had already placed my name on the books of a certain Madame Papillon, who kept what was politely called "A Governesses' Institution,"—it seemed exactly like a register office for governesses. In less than a week I was "*placée*," as Madame called it; I paid my fee right willingly, and made speedy preparations for entering upon another situation.

Far different from the Peppers were the Peverels, with whom my lot was now cast. They lived at a place I shall call Clare Green; and Clare Green was

close to the little, ancient town of Sutton Magna, on the dark, barge-laden river Black. Six or seven miles distant was a huge, smoky, densely populated manufacturing town, that I will call Blackingham, a kind of minor metropolis, and the centre of a large district famed for subterranean wealth, blast furnaces, iron-works, and the absence of everything that conduces to the physical beauty of a country.

I reached Blackingham just as the sun was going down broad and red on his smoky horizon; he loomed through the dense sulphurous haze, as I have seen him loom, large and grand, through the blue mists of the northern moors. But ah! he looked down upon a far different world than any I had ever seen before, save in my journey to and from Lunechester, when I had caught just a glimpse of the manufacturing districts of South Lunecheshire. And here I was in the midst of smoke and smuts—"blacks," I think, is their local generic name; here were dingy streets, brick-kilns, coal-yards—for I did not then enter the town itself, I only saw it in the distance, the train stopping in one of the busiest and most plebeian-looking suburbs of Blackingham;—here were canals crossing and recrossing each other in all directions; the water dark and foul, and in many places smoking, or rather steaming, I knew not from what source; but it seemed so hot, that, had it only been clean, I am sure the humble housewives in its vicinity might have made use of it for cooking and laundry purposes! Afterwards I discovered that this apparent phenomenon was

caused by the spare boiling water from countless engines on the banks, running into the canal.

At the station I was met by Mr. Peverel himself; he was a melancholy, austere-looking man, about forty years of age, and he gave me the idea of a person very much depressed and weighed down with care. He was, however, a thorough gentleman; there was an unmistakeable air of birth and breeding in his grave, somewhat reserved, and yet kindly greeting; and I rejoiced to think that with the well-born Peverels I should not have to encounter the vulgar pretensions and the purse-proud arrogance that had so much annoyed me during my residence with the Pepper family.

As we drove along, through the fast-gathering twilight, I mused upon my opening prospects—surely *now* I was going to be comfortably settled; things seemed promising at last. I was going to live with people who would appreciate the tone and manner I had insensibly acquired through intercourse with my dear aunt and her friends; and all I had heard of the Peverels was in their favour. There was only one drawback: my salary was somewhat less than I had received from Mrs. Pepper; but that consideration I was willing to waive, if only I could secure a pleasant home and congenial society. Besides, I was given to understand that Mrs. Peverel and her daughters dressed plainly, and that very little company was ever entertained at Clare Green Hall. If my income was diminished, so also in proportion were my expenses.

I was glad to find, as we passed along, that we presently left behind us brick-fields, rows of red staring little houses, tall chimneys, and canals, with the "constant bridge," and the deep, Styx-like looking locks. By the light of the moon, which was now high in heaven, I perceived meadows; stubble-fields, whence the harvest had lately been gathered in; small woods; and, occasionally, handsome houses, standing in their own grounds not far from the highway along which we were driving. By-and-by, we came to Sutton Magna, and we drove carefully through the paved, irregular square of the market-place; then along a quiet-looking street; then, for a short space, along the high road once more, till the lodge of Clare Green Hall was reached; and then we stopped before a handsome portico, and I had reached my new home, from which, with all the sanguine spirit of youth, I hoped great things.

I liked Mrs. Peverel very much; she was gentle and kind in her manner, though, like her husband, grave, and somewhat inclined to taciturnity; there was also on her countenance, as on his, an expression of weariness and wearing anxiety. She could not have been more than thirty-five, and yet there were lines of care and corrugations of the brow that made her look a dozen years older; her hair, too, was abundantly streaked with grey, and I noticed that she put on spectacles whenever she wished to see anything clearly. My pupils—Ellen and Mary Peverel—were pale, lady-like girls, quiet in look and manner, every feature and every glance expres-

sive of modesty and docility, and their voices peculiarly gentle, refined, and musical. They were respectively thirteen and fifteen years of age. There were four other children, all boys; two at school, and two little ones in the nursery, with whom I had nothing to do. The family were waiting tea for me, and presently we sat down round the large table in the dining-room, and the lamp was lit, and the urn brought in, and I prepared to be very comfortable.

But there was something—I could not exactly say what—that chilled and restrained me. For one thing, I was rather cold; my long journey, and an hour's drive in an open carriage at a period of the year when the evenings are by no means proportionately warm with the rest of the day, had made me feel languid and inclined to shiver; and there was no fire in the grate, though we had had one lighted after tea, for more than a week past, at Myrtle Cottage. The room, too, was large, and the walls hung with a rich but sombre paper which did not light up at all in the feeble rays of the lamp, which seemed to be called, in mockery, a *solar* lamp. The tea, also, was nearly as frugal as that we had been favoured with at Westminster; but here it was the family meal; Mr. and Mrs. Peverel and myself partaking of thin bread and butter, and the young ladies helping themselves from a plate of more substantial slices; while at Westminster it was only the school-room repasts that were so plain and even coarse; the late dinner being always a

chef-d'œuvre of cookery and delicacies, and the drawing-room tea-table invariably laden with muffins, and crumpets, and cakes, and choice preserves, with their accompaniments of strong tea, and hot, fragrant coffee. Lettice Pepper looked forward to dining and taking tea at the family table as the great result of "coming out," and she disliked, more than any of us, "the simplicity," as Mrs. Pepper styled it, of our fare in the upper regions. But here the simplicity was evidently the rule of the house, the elders enjoying few privileges beyond those accorded to the children. On account of my fatiguing journey, and on the score of my having dined on a hard biscuit, a boiled egg was brought in for my especial consumption, and Mrs. Peverel would have persuaded her husband to add one to his plain bread-and-butter tea, but he refused on the ground of his having dined heartily at two o'clock. Whether he spoke the truth then I do not know, but most certainly I never saw him make a hearty meal while I was an inmate of Clare Green Hall. I never knew a man eat so little, sleep so little, or talk so little. When he did eat it was without the least sign of relish; when he talked it was always to the point, but in the fewest words possible; how he slept I cannot tell, but I do know that he slept very little, remaining in his study hours after the rest of the family had retired to rest, and rising in the morning before any one save the servants were stirring. He wrote, wrote, wrote, morning, noon, and night, unfalteringly, and

for the most part, as it would seem, unwearily. There is an old rhyme that says, touching slumber and the hours that should be yielded to it—

“Nature requires six,
Custom gives seven,
Laziness takes nine,
And wickedness eleven.”

Mr. Peverel never accorded to his nature more than four hours' repose. No wonder he looked so careworn, and stern, and harassed; no wonder he was so pale and thin, and dead to all innocent enjoyment of life. He was, like myself, a seeker after that which evermore eluded his anxious grasp. And, like myself, he did not see his miserable error; he did not know that, as regarded the highest aims and the purest and noblest aspirations of human existence, he was altogether blind—blind as one whose visual faculty has been undeveloped from the moment of birth. There was none to say to him, “Except the Lord build the house, they labour in vain that build it; except the Lord keep the city, the watchman waketh but in vain. It is vain for you to rise up early, to sit up late, to eat the bread of sorrows; for so he giveth his beloved sleep.”

I soon discovered that my present employers were very, very poor; that is, very poor for the station of life to which they were born. The family of the Peverels had dwelt at Clare Green for many generations; at least, it was one of their seats, the smallest and the most unpretending. Peverel Castle, the most lordly mansion in all —shire, had once been

theirs; but it had passed away from the "poor, proud Peverels" in the days of Mr. Peverel's grandfather. All the country round Sutton Magna—nay, nearly all the town itself—all the once glorious Chase—had belonged to the Peverels, the lords of the soil, who, however, for the most part, kept state in their fine old baronial castle in the next county. Now all had passed away, their wealth, their importance, and their grandeur; and Walter Peverel, the present possessor, lived quietly and sadly, and with painful economy, at Clare Green Hall. No allusion to the princely demesne of Peverel was ever permitted in his presence; and the same formalities that would have been in keeping with the profuse expenditure and the almost royal cheer of his ancestors, were scrupulously observed, in circumstances that any thriving tradesman in Blackingham would have considered miserably poor and mean. Many of the rooms were shut up, for the most part unfurnished, for the staff of domestics was quite inadequate to the needs of the house; the grounds were falling into decay, the kitchen-garden and the lawn in front of the house being the only portions on which due care and cultivation were bestowed. Our daily fare, though always sufficient in quantity, was of the plainest kind, and we were all teetotallers, an arrangement that did not suit me at all, as I had never been altogether a water-drinker. There was great economy, too, in the matter of fires; none were lighted till it was quite impossible to dispense with them altogether, and then only a limited quantity of fuel was con-

sumed. Often through that long freezing winter did I sit by the side of the dying school-room fire, which it was forbidden to replenish after a certain hour in the evening, till hands and feet were benumbed, and my blood quite chill; and then hours and hours I lay awake shivering in my bed, and unable to sleep because my poor feet ached from their icy coldness. Of course such a thing as a fire in a bedroom was unthought of, a luxury never enjoyed either by my pupils or their parents; and yet, in severe weather, I had never been without one. Even in Chetwode-street, when it froze hard, my poor mother would have a fire lighted in our attic, "that the girls might not catch their deaths of cold;" and at Luncester and at Altbury, my private hearth was never empty and cold; I had not been at Westminster in the fire season. Of course I could not ask for what every one else was denied; and as I was young and tolerably strong, I should not have cared much about it if I had been able to warm myself before going to bed.

But as the winter wore away, and a long, chilly spring followed, when the nipping east winds were more than commonly prevalent, my health began to fail. As usual, I was far from happy. My pupils gave me no trouble; they learned with avidity and ease, and clung to me with a tenderness that was really refreshing, after the arrogance and coldness of the Pepper girls, and their insupportable airs of superiority and their haughty reserve.

I could not but love them, poor things! and I

am sure they loved me; and yet the monotony of my life was depressing—extremely so. Mrs. Peverel had spoken truly when she wrote, in reference to my salary, that my dress need cost me but little, as they lived in great retirement, and seldom visited, or received company. Had she substituted *never* for *seldom*, she would not have erred. Then the cold, and the poor living, told upon my system, which, perhaps, at the outset, was not in a very thriving condition; and I became seriously unwell. It made Mrs. Peverel quite sad, and my dear girls really wretched, when they saw me, day after day, declining food, and sitting, pale and shivering, wrapped in one of my aunt's great India blankets, as she used to call a peculiar shawl of remarkably fine, soft texture, and warm material. And very unhappy I was, as well as very unwell.

Yes, I was as far as ever from happiness—as far as ever from anything approaching the merest contentment. And now, for the first time, I began seriously to consider the matter—to take myself to task—was it, or was it not, that *in myself* was the error? Was I so constituted, or was there something so deficient in my mental calibre, that I *could not* be happy? Or, on the other hand, was I peculiarly unfortunate in falling always into such situations as were replete, in one way or another, with trying circumstances? Was the fault, or the misfortune, mine, or that of the untoward circumstances that I seemed always and everywhere to encounter? What was my life worth, unless I

could be happy? It was all very well to say I would give up trying to be happy, I would let things take their own course, and make up my mind to submit to the decrees of Providence, or, as I said myself, of *Fate*. It was very well to *say* this to myself, or to another; it was all very well to determine to be a Stoic, and "to say to all manner of happiness, I can do without thee." I *could not* do without happiness; I would as soon have died as have spent the remainder of my life in the same dull or poignant series of disappointments that had been my experience from the day when I wept myself to sleep, a heart-broken little child, in the playground of Agenoria House.

Then I remembered what I had often heard about religion being the only true source of peace and joy; I recalled all that Mr. Clarenham had said in the coach on my memorable journey to Lunechester, all that Nurse Dent had said, and finally all that I had heard from the beloved lips that were sealed beneath the stone in the old church of Kirkby-Hutton—all that was revealed to me then of the peace, and joy, and the blessed close that religion gave to one, whose days had so long been darkened by care, and anguish, and vain remorse. Why had I not thought of this before? True, I had thought of it, but only in a dreamy, poetic fashion, that had little or no influence upon my life, none at all upon my principles of thought and action. Now, then, I would begin in earnest to be religious; I would give up worldly longings and vain aspirations; I would devote

myself to higher and holier pursuits; I would give myself to works of charity and acts of faith.

And to myself I said,—

“How fading are the joys we dote upon,
Like apparitions seen and gone;
But those which soonest take their flight
Are the most exquisite and strong,
Like angels’ visits, short and bright.”

Yes, fading were earth’s pleasures, and transient earth’s sweetest joys, and frequent and perplexing were earthly cares and disappointments. Henceforth, I would renounce them all, and seek my happiness in God.

CHAPTER XXIX.

ST. HILDA.

Again, it is a calmer hour,
The winds are hushed, the storm is o'er;
And eve's rich crimson, deep and bright,
Leaves on the sea a flushing light;
The soft autumnal moon on high
Pours down her mellow radiancy;
The curlew sleeps in rocky nest—
The quiet world sinks down to rest.

Sacred Year (14th Sunday after Trinity).

A wet, chilly summer followed that grey, cold spring, and a very dreary summer it was to me. And not to me only, but to all that were gathered within the old walls of Clare Green Hall, for day by day the shadow seemed to rest deeper and deeper upon Walter Peverel, and upon his gentle, silent wife. He looked sterner, and spoke less than ever; she was always brooding in patient sorrow over some secret care; the girls wore a sad and subdued air; and even the servants, and the little ones who lived in the nursery, moved about the house as if they feared to wake the echoes of its silent, joyless chambers. The gloom that overhung our daily life was sufficient to damp a far more sanguine and energetic spirit than mine. As it was, I became nearly as melancholy as the owners of that dull, quiet mansion, and I continued to suffer from languor, general lassitude, and depression of mind.

And was my newly-found remedy unavailing to counteract the evils of my position? Was religion no more, and nothing better, than the other resources I had tried? Nothing better! for the religious duties which I imposed upon myself were only a heavy burden, a mere weariness to the flesh and to the spirit. In vain I read my prescribed number of chapters in the Bible both morning and evening; in vain I repeated every word of a long and formal prayer that I found in an old book of private devotions; in vain I kept the Sabbath-day with a strictness that would have been to any one a bondage too hard to be endured; in vain I put away all my novels and all my cherished poets, and gave myself solely to the perusal of serious literature; in vain I sought to mortify myself by dispensing with every superfluous article of dress, and every ornamental trifle; by smoothing down in plain bands all my pretty shining curls, that *would* wave and curl in little tendrils, however straightly they were braided, and by assuming a garb of almost conventual plainness, as mean and coarse as it was tasteless! Yes, all in vain! For a time I was proud of my ugly print dress, my seven-and-sixpenny shawl, my plain linen collar, and my coarse straw bonnet, with a piece of ribbon plain across it, after the fashion of charity children, and a bit of simple quilled net by way of bonnet cap. But presently I began to grow indifferent on the subject; and the fact of my being arrayed in a dress that cost three shillings—it was a cheap *de laine*, so ugly and old-fashioned that I got it at a very

great bargain—soon ceased to be even a source of complacency; I lost my delight in its dirty green and its reddish drab, as completely as I had ceased to care about my beautiful grey satinette and my violet-coloured French merino, so richly trimmed with velvet — relics, as they were, of my palmy Lunechester days, when I was attired like a lady of substance. The grey skies, and the watery sunsets, and the chill, moaning breezes of that dismal summer I shall ever remember; and memory will depict them with painful fidelity as emblems of my inner and outer life at that period. Gloom was on the fair face of nature; gloom was on the sombre chambers and galleries of the Hall; gloom was in the hearts of its inhabitants; and gloom unspeakable, and darkness that might be felt, were in my own helpless, miserable soul.

But a change was awaiting me. No wonder that under the circumstances I became really ill, and was compelled to seek medical advice; no wonder that I was seized by low, nervous fever, that laid me aside from my duties, and threatened a long and serious illness. My doctor was the kindest man in the world, and he soon told me that I must not remain at Clare Green Hall; the air did not suit me; I needed an atmosphere at once more genial and more bracing; I needed good living, doses of quinine and plenty of old Madeira, or port wine; I ought to spend the next twelve months in Devonshire, on the coast. He might as well have told me I ought to go to the Holy Land; and as for

Madeira and quinine, I knew that if I had any, I must purchase them myself. I only felt more hopeless and inert than ever; I felt as if I could not rouse myself to the exertion necessary to quitting my present abode and seeking another situation; besides, who would engage an invalid governess? Governesses have no business to be out of health; I knew that very well; and never had I felt more averse to returning home again, as it seemed, for an indefinite period. I had no trust in Providence, no faith in God; it never occurred to me that One, all-wise and all-tender, knew my path, and would in due time lead thither my weary feet. I did not—how could I?—commit my way unto the Lord, trusting in Him that He would bring it to pass; neither could I “rest in the Lord, and wait patiently for Him.”

But my Heavenly Father cared for me, who cared not in truth for Him. His earthly sunshine and shower were for me, a rebel and an ingrate, as well as for those who “put their trust under the shadow of His wings.” When my spirit was overwhelmed within me, then *He knew my path*. Relief came to me through the instrumentality of Dr. Netherby, my kind and generous physician. One day he appeared with a letter in his hand, and his fine face beaming with satisfaction. His brother-in-law, the Rev. Percival Beaufort, was in need of a governess for his only daughter and child, a little girl of twelve. The lady must be a member of the Church of England, well-connected, and of course

competent to undertake the entire education of her pupil, &c. Mrs. Beaufort, the doctor's favourite sister, was, he assured me, a very superior woman, affectionate and considerate, and her daughter was the most charming little creature that ever existed. Moreover, the Beauforts lived by the sea-side, in Devonshire, and the salary offered was sixty pounds.

I entered into correspondence with Mrs. Beaufort, and her letters pleased me exceedingly; above all, I rested in the deeply religious tone which they revealed. Surely, with the sentiments I now entertained, here, after all my disappointments great and manifold, was a home to my liking.

Mrs. Beaufort described, in glowing colours, the beauty of the scenery by which her residence was surrounded. She painted her ivy-covered rectory, surrounded by myrtles, and nearly perennial roses; she spoke of the great voice of the sea, breaking on his craggy shore, only a mile away; of the breezy downs and the rocky hills of the fair country round about the pleasant village of St. Hilda. She told me, too, of the ancient church, with its minster-like aisles, its beautiful choir, and its exquisite fretted altar-screen; and of the sweetness and comfort of the daily service, which all in the house attended; and she spoke too of her daughter, of her one treasure, the little Lucia, in terms that made me long to be installed in the chair of office, in the school-room of St. Hilda's rectory.

I was wild to go! The very prospect of a change wonderfully restored me; and very soon I

had arranged matters with Mrs. Peverel, and written to my friends at home, and was making preparations for my journey into the South. I was sorry to part from the family when the time came; Mrs. Peverel embraced me with her usual air of silent sorrow, and the girls wept profusely, and said it was always so,—whenever they had a governess that they loved, and wanted to keep, something came to pass, that she went away and left them. “They were very unfortunate,” Mary said plaintively; and poor Ellen murmured that it was very gloomy and sad, living always at Clare Green,—if papa could only have his own Peverel Castle, or if they could go sometimes to the sea, or to London, to take lessons, it would be better.” I said good-bye with a sad heart after all; there was something inexpressibly mournful in leaving them there, to the dullness, and the monotony, and the narrow means, from which I was so thankful to make my escape. Poor girls! a mournful heritage was theirs, daughters of that decayed house—“the poor, proud Peverels!”

My reception at St. Hilda's was all that I could wish. Again it was a September evening, for I had lived nearly twelve months at Clare Green, and again the sun was going down on the western horizon; but not in clouds of smoke and murky vapours—no! on broad waves, that heaved and shimmered like molten gold; on hoary cliffs, and grey limestone crags, and dark woodlands, and green vales, where emerald verdure and the beauty of flowers still lived, as yet untouched by the icy breath of autumnal frosts.

And then came in sight the village of St. Hilda, and its fine old church, — a miniature cathedral, — and then the white walls of the rectory, mantled with shining green leaves, and jasmine, and roses, still wearing their summer purity and loveliness.

The evening was mild, and the ebb tide lapped idly among the weed-fringed rocks of the great promontory of St. Hilda. Everything was calm, and fair, and pure; and the church clock striking the quarters, in deep and solemn tones, seemed the only fitting voice to break the sweet silence of the hour and of the scene.

And if all without was peacefully beautiful and still, all within was peacefully bright; and on the hearth of my new friends I forgot that I had been an invalid, and that I was sadly wearied with my journey. Presently the bells struck out, and began chiming, and Mr. Beaufort rose, and his little daughter rose also, and looked at her mamma, who replied to the mute interrogatory, "No, my dear, I will stay with Miss Kendrick to-night; you go and put on your bonnet, and accompany papa to church." When we were alone, Mrs. Beaufort explained that there was service in the church both morning and evening, and that every one in the house was at liberty to attend. I liked the idea, and I said so; though hitherto I had never thought of attending Divine service on any other day than Sunday.

I don't know how it was; but that evening, as it grew darker and darker, and I sat alone with Mrs. Beaufort, I began to speak of my inner life.

I think she insensibly drew me towards the subject; however it might be, I opened all my heart to her, as I had never done to any living creature. I told her all my disappointments, all my regrets, my vain yearning after rest and happiness, my ever-renewed contest with adverse circumstances, and my long and fruitless struggle to lead a religious life, that, in its fulness and its interior joy, should overbalance all the cares and chagrins of my existence.

"Poor child!" she said, gently stroking the hand which, in the passion of the unsealing of those long-pent-up fountains of bitter waters, I had laid confidingly in her own, "God has sent you to us, that in the blessed ordinances of the Church you may find peace and joy. But you must have some conversation with Mr. Beaufort, my dear."

"Oh! no, no; indeed I cannot," I replied, shrinking back again into my natural reserve. I felt that it was one thing to pour forth my sorrow to a gentle, sisterly woman like herself, and quite another thing to have audience of a clergyman, and open to him the floodgates of emotion, and the bitter pages of my experience. But Mrs. Beaufort told me that I must not say so: it was my first duty to seek clerical aid and counsel, and the Church required from her faithful children unswerving confidence and unqualified obedience. Besides, Mr. Beaufort was accustomed to deal with such cases; it was his province and his duty to minister to the wants and to heal the diseases of the sinful, miserable soul; and he must know the full extent.

of the evil, the source of the malady, before he could tell how and where to apply the remedy sanctioned by the teaching of the Church. And was he not my pastor, to whom the secrets of my heart *ought* to be laid open?

Though I still shrank from it, yet Mrs. Beaufort's words and tone were so persuasive, that I began to feel that it would be a relief, an inexpressible comfort, if I could summon sufficient courage to tell all my troubles to her husband, as I had told them to her: and when she had further spoke of the authority and the Divine commission of the *priests* of the Church, I felt that I dared no longer oppose my own weakness to that which, all suddenly, had become in my eyes an imperative duty.

I went to bed full of new thoughts and ideas; but first I joined in family prayer, conducted of course by Mr. Beaufort in the library, where the whole household was assembled. Prayers were read at an early hour, in order that Lucia might be present, and that the servants whose work was over might feel themselves at liberty to retire when they pleased. A most excellent arrangement in every point of view.

In many pious families, both lay and clerical, domestic worship comes the last thing. All the enjoyments of the evening must have their fling; the tale must be finished, the supper, or the wine and water and biscuits, must be duly discussed; the gentleman must finish his cigar, and the lady must complete her task of needlework, ere the weary servants are summoned, and the books are opened for

worship. And then comes the suppressed yawn, the idle wandering thought, the mechanical folding of the hands and kneeling down, or, it may be, the hope that the chapter is a short one, and a wish that the prayer may be curtailed. I have known "prayers" made an infliction, a positive nuisance, where they might have been made a joy, a refreshing privilege, and that by people who say, and mean it too, "As for me and my house, we will serve the Lord."

That venerated saint and minister, John Angell James, unceasingly deplored, as one of the great evils of the age, what he graphically called "that suburban tendency" of members of Christian churches to fix their abode at so great a distance from their place of worship, as to render regular attendance on the means of grace a serious difficulty, frequently amounting to impossibility. They are obliged to content themselves with one service on the Lord's-day; and the prayer-meeting and ordinary services of the week are by degrees disregarded, till the ordinances of the sanctuary are almost foregone, or till they fall into a mere cold, formal observance, as injurious to the soul as insufficient nourishment to the body.

The aged minister was right; such carelessness about church privileges is indeed a serious and increasing evil of our day; but scarcely less so is the procrastinating spirit which puts off family prayers till eyes are weary and brains are drowsy, and the tired frame is longing for repose. Giving the service of God those moments which can just be

spared from the avocations of ordinary duties—devoting to him the leisure of weariness and exhausted nature! Next to carelessness of church privileges is the evil of late prayers.

Mr. Beaufort's prayers were not long; he read only part of a chapter, of which the whole was rather over the average length; and the supplications which followed were portions of the evening service of the Church of England. All was over in a few minutes, and I, now thoroughly tired out, and feeling my weakness once more, was glad to retire when Lucia bade her parents good-night. I wondered whether Mrs. Beaufort would say anything to her husband of what had passed between us during his absence.

I looked round my chamber. How neat and comfortable it was! how replete with every convenience! When I looked forth from my window, there was the grey church, and the deep woods of the hill-side, and the broad heaving sea, its waves rising and falling in the soft moonbeams. Surely I should be at peace here. Surely under the very shadow of the church my weary heart would find the repose it had so long sought—and sought in vain.

How pleasant it was when, next morning, I saw the waves sparkle in the glad sunshine, and looked down upon the myrtles, and the bright autumn flowers, in the gay parterre beneath! How minster-like seemed the grand old church, with its turreted tower, and its heavy buttresses, and its hoary pinnacles rising up against the clear, blue September

sky! And how solemnly sweet sounded the prolonged striking of the quarters and the hour; the "iron tongue of time" telling its tale to the dwellers in that peaceful village; and its echoes dying away among the hills, and along the rocky shore, where the tide was rising higher and higher over the weed-fringed rocks. It was more beautiful in that resplendent sunshine than in the shadowy twilight or in the moonbeams of the preceding evening.

I went down-stairs, and Mrs. Beaufort and Lucia both came to kiss me, and congratulate me upon looking so much better after my night's rest. And Mr. Beaufort spoke kindly, and his conversation, though serious in its tone, was pleasant and even amusing. Then the post came in, and letters were discussed, and I was appealed to, and circumstances were explained, and at last Mrs. Beaufort said, "I should soon know all about them and their matters, and be quite one of themselves." And Lucia volunteered to take me into the village when lessons were over, and show me where everybody lived, and introduce me to everybody.

"And it will be charming to have some one to work with me in the schools," said Mrs. Beaufort. "Lucia has had but one governess before, and she was a very sweet person, but quite averse to any kind of parish-work; indeed, she would not conform to the daily services, and she had not correct views touching Church discipline and the authority of the clergy; there must have been something defective in her religious training. Lucia has her own little

class of infants, of course; but she is quite too young to take any prominent part in the work; indeed, I do not like girls to be brought forward even in sacred duties, so long as they are in the school-room. Now I look to you to be my right hand—my second self—always under Mr. Beaufort's guidance and direction."

I assented, pledging myself to do all that lay in my power; for there was so persuasive a power in Mrs. Beaufort's words, and tones, and glances, that had she desired me to undertake any kind of mission I should immediately have endeavoured to meet her wishes. Mr. Beaufort seemed pleased, and begged that I would consider myself quite at home in every respect, and come to him for advice whenever I needed it, without hesitation or fear of intrusion. "At any hour and for any length of time," he said most kindly and courteously, he was at my disposal.

I knew what he meant; Mrs. Beaufort had evidently disclosed to him the difficulties and the perils with which I was still struggling. I looked at him, and as his sweet, mild, fatherly glance met mine, my heart responded to the invitation, and with tears in my eyes I thanked him, and determined to avail myself of his spiritual counsel.

When he left the room, Mrs. Beaufort drew me towards her, whispering, "Dear child, you will be much happier when you have confided to your pastor all that is grieving your spirit. Do not delay; and confide to him without reserve all your griefs, and all your doubts and temptations."

CHAPTER XXX.

ST. HILDA'S CHANCEL.

On marble pillar cold,
The death-cold hand doth rest;
The chancel drear and old,
With weight of gloom oppress,
Becomes the warrior's home at last;
For long the flush of life hath past;
On his dull ear the battle's roar
Hath died away for evermore.

CANTABRIGIENSIS.

LUCIA and I kept holiday for the remainder of that week, Mrs. Beaufort insisting that I should make myself quite at home, and learn the habits of the house before I commenced my duties in the school-room. We regularly attended the two daily services in the church, we visited the schools, and to me was entrusted the charge of practising the children in the chants and psalm-tunes in which they were expected to take a prominent share. Lucia performed her promise, too, and introduced me to half the people in the village, from Miss Thorndale, the squire's daughter, the *belle* and heiress of St. Hilda's, down to poor, bed-ridden Betsy Crump, who eked out her scanty resources by making nets of twine for fruit-trees, &c. When Sunday came, I felt as thoroughly domesticated as if I had been in the house four months, instead of four days.

And in the meantime I had conversed privately

with Mr. Beaufort, and had opened to him, as his wife had entreated me, "all my heart." It was on the Saturday evening that this conversation occurred. I believed Mr. Beaufort to be from home, as he had been called from the tea-table to go instantly to baptize a dying child; and I went into the study to look for a book, that Mrs. Beaufort had strongly recommended me to peruse. I entered without knocking, and there, to my extreme consternation, sat Mr. Beaufort, busied, I suppose, with his sermon for the morrow. I was retreating in the utmost confusion, murmuring an apology as I went, when he called me back. There was something so mild and so commanding in his tones, that it was impossible to hesitate—to hear was to obey.

Accordingly, I returned, and he begged to know what I wanted. I told him, again making my excuses for apparent rudeness; but he bade me say no more about it; I was welcome in every room in the house, and especially in this, where books were always open to my selection, and himself at my disposal. And this he said standing, displaying the same polished courtesy to me, his hired governess, as to any other lady of his acquaintance; then he went to the shelves, sought out the book I had named, and placed it in my hands. I thanked him, and was going away, when he said, "Miss Kendrick, am I right in believing that you wish to have some conversation with me on religious subjects? I understood it to be so, from Mrs. Beaufort."

I murmured an assent; and he continued, "Are

you at liberty this evening? because I shall be most happy to listen *now* to what you have to say, and to afford you the ghostly counsel and comfort which my priestly office authorizes me to bestow. Will you sit down?"

I cannot describe his manner; it was a compound of all that was kind, gentle, and winning, and all that was firm, decided, and uncompromising. Only once since have I ever seen any face like his; it had such a strange, saintly beauty, and it compelled as much reverence as admiration. Only once since have I seen eyes so soft, yet so penetrating; they seemed to read your inmost soul, and yet they spoke volumes of love and tenderest regard for your best interests; only once since have I seen a mouth so indicative of sweetness and strength. And the whole countenance was so radiant with purity, intelligence, and lofty sentiment, that, as you gazed, there stole over you an irresistible sense of fascination, tempered by reverential awe.

I felt this, then, when I raised my eyes, and met his calm, clear, penetrating orbs fixed upon mine; I felt that a strong influence was upon me, that I must obey his behests, that I must speak, however reluctantly, and hide nothing from that keen, piercing intellect. And in a few minutes every barrier of restraint seemed swept away; his questioning, so definite, so much to the purpose, and yet so delicate and so paternal, drew from me the full and free revelation of all my past life, its errors and its struggles. He was deeply interested, and when I had

finished, I waited eagerly for what he might have to say; I listened for his words as for an opening oracle.

When they came, they were very gentle and sympathising, but full of power and earnestness. He told me that all my sorrow and conflict arose from a want of the only source and foundation of all human happiness. "I had never sought in religion all that I had so anxiously sought from the world and its unsatisfying pleasures. I had never fully identified myself with the Church of which I was a member; I had never truly listened to her voice, or sought her guidance, or availed myself of her inestimable privileges. I was a careless, if not a rebellious child; but my mother, the holy Church, was still ready to open her arms to me, and impart those blessings and that grace which she proffers to all who seek her shelter, and long to find in her their true home on earth."

I was a little startled, for I had not been accustomed to regard the Established Church of England in this light; it seemed to me that Mr. Beaufort was claiming for her that which the Romish Church contends for as a peculiarity of her own; but I knew myself to be lamentably ignorant on religious matters, and his words were so replete with power, and so calmly authoritative, that I could not but receive them as unadulterated truth and wisdom.

Then we had a long talk about baptismal regeneration, a dogma then not so widely discussed as at present, and I learned that already, long ago, I

had been born again, and had been made "a member of Christ, a child of God, and an inheritor of the kingdom of heaven." Of course this was *true*, because it was in the Catechism, because it was the plain, concise teaching of my Church, and last, not least, because Mr. Beaufort said so. But though I tried to believe it without reservation, I found it difficult of comprehension; it was clear that my faith must either be a blind faith or no faith at all. Nicodemus's question—"Can a man be born again when he is old?" recurred to my mind with startling significance. What was said, in misapprehension, of the natural birth, seemed equally applicable to the spiritual birth; if I had been born again in my baptism, how did it happen that I had lived all these years in unconsciousness of the fact, and, as my conscience loudly proclaimed, in disregard of, and indifference to, the duties and privileges of a regenerated person? How could any one be alive and not know it? How could I have been "a member of Christ" for one-and-twenty years without having discovered my position? Mr. Beaufort saw that I looked puzzled, and he entered more fully into the subject, informing me that it was the stain of *original*, and not of *actual*, sin that was washed away in baptism; and that in the holy sacrament of baptism sufficient grace was accorded to keep the heart pure and free from sin, but that through the frailty of human nature it was "sinned away;" and it was the work of the Church, through her ministers and ordinances, to bring back to the

fold, and restore to its birthright, the erring and guilty soul.

Much more he added, but I will not record it here, because a thorough polemical discussion would extend this story to too great a length; and all that Mr. Beaufort advanced was of the same character as that I have already spoken of;—regeneration in baptism, and the saving character of the ordinance of the Lord's Supper, being the two grand points on which all else turned. Strange to say, though my intellect refused to be convinced, I gave implicit credence to all that my new pastor advanced. I think it was his tone of authority that compelled me, as it were, to silence the workings of my own mind; I believed him in spite of myself; and was there not the Church Catechism and the Confirmation Service both tending to establish his words? I dared not doubt any longer. Besides, weary as I long had been, tempest-tossed as I was, it was an inexpressible relief to rest upon something that claimed — virtually at least — to be infallible. It seemed that, in some sort, the great responsibility of my soul's salvation rested no longer upon myself; I had only to defer to the teaching of my Church, and to obey my spiritual pastors and masters in all things.

Mr. Beaufort concluded his remarks by an eloquent description of the peace and joy of those who are true and faithful members of Christ's Church upon earth: there was a pathos and a thrilling force in the words that stirred the very depths of my soul, and brought

the tears to my eyes. I felt a sense of repose equally new and delicious steal over my aching heart; and yet, it was not exactly repose,—it was quiet, more than rest, that I was beginning to experience.

The next day confirmed all my newly-born aspirations. After an early breakfast, we went to the Sunday-school; and the first class, hitherto Mrs. Beaufort's charge, was consigned to me, that she might devote herself entirely to the duties of superintendent: then came the Morning Service, and the Liturgy, as read, or "said," by Mr. Beaufort, seemed filled with new power and meaning. I heartily joined in the Confession, and bowed my head in lowly penitence to the succeeding Absolution. It was Sacrament Sunday, and with my newly-awakened perceptions, and with the conversation of the preceding evening still fresh in my memory, I joined in the Communion Service with a seeming fervour, and a spirit of mingled abasement and triumph; and I began, I imagined, to understand and to experience what was meant by the privileges of the Church.

We dined early on cold meat, and again adjourned to the Sunday-school, and when at four o'clock we dismissed the children, there was an interval of rest, which each member of the household was accustomed to spend in privacy. The tea-bell called us together again, and that repast over, we prepared for Evening Service. Mr. Beaufort's sermon that evening was startlingly earnest, and extremely eloquent: the beauty of his language, the grace of his style, and the deep music of his voice were of themselves

sufficient to enlist the sympathies and rivet the attention of his auditors; but, added to the extrinsic adornments, were other and yet more effective endowments. He possessed a power of oratory that would have won for him, in a larger sphere, overflowing congregations and enthusiastic admiration; for your eloquent preacher is always popular even when his matter is unoriginal or unsound, or both. And more thrilling eloquence than I listened to, Sabbath by Sabbath, in the grand old church of St. Hilda's, I cannot imagine.

How beautiful the church looked on that first Sunday evening! It was well lighted, for, through the exertions of Mr. Beaufort, we had a little gasometer of our own, a very rare acquisition, nineteen years ago, in a country town or village. The rays fell softly on the antique altar-screen, and on the fair arches, that rose, in their graceful proportions, almost to the groined and vaulted roof. We were singing the last hymn, or, to speak more correctly, the last *psalm*, for the metrical version at the end of the Prayer-book was all the hymnal we possessed. Mr. Beaufort did not approve of "collections" or "selections" by various authors; he deemed them "undesirable, tending to foster restlessness, innovation, and love of change, and altogether resembling the manner of Dissenters," whom I soon discovered he held in great abhorrence. I was still greatly moved by the sermon, which was just concluded, and I knew it had been delivered with a special view to my benefit, for there were passages

in it explicable, indeed, to any auditory, but most strongly so to myself, when last night's conversation was considered. Suddenly I met the gaze of my pastor, as, with calm, dignified aspect, he looked down from the pulpit to the rectory pew beneath; and it seemed to read my very soul, and to penetrate all the hidden recesses of my mind; and yet it was so calm, so gravely tender, so full of an infinite compassion for the erring—provided they were not decided Nonconformists—that the power and depth of that sweet solemn glance, instead of making me tremble and shrink, melted my heart, and brought the ready tears to my eyes. I was glad to draw down my veil, and hide the emotion I could not control. We usually lingered till all the congregation had dispersed, and till Mr. Beaufort issued from the vestry, disrobed, and ready to accompany us home; and this evening he was detained by his churchwardens, and Mrs. Beaufort joined him, and Lucia and I wandered away to the eastern end of the church. Presently the little girl left my side—she had found a monument which she was very anxious to decipher—so I was alone, in the dim shadowy chancel. There were the low-browed arches—the chancel-end of this beautiful church was Norman, being more ancient than the nave and clerestory, which were in the early Gothic style;—there was the grand eastern window, so glorious in the morning sunshine, and in the bright moonlight nights, when its gem-like hues fell aslant the armed knight and lady on the altar-tomb, and on the *marble floor*, worn with the feet of the worshippers

of by-gone centuries. Yes! this was "a casement high, and triple-arched,"

"All garlanded with carven imageries
Of fruits, and flowers, and bunches of knot grass,
And diamonded with panes of quaint device,
Innumerable of stains and splendid dyes,
As are the tiger-moth's deep-damasked wings;
And in the midst, 'mong thousand heraldries,
And twilight saints, and dim emblazonings,
A shielded 'scutcheon blush'd with blood of queens and kings."

I beg pardon for introducing these beautiful, but oft-quoted lines; I dare say you can all repeat them verbatim—I could, I know, when I was twelve years old—but no words of mine could so adequately describe that fair chancel window of St. Hilda's Church; and after all, true poetry, such as this is, loses nothing by ever-recurring repetition; its gifted author, poor Keats, said truly,

"A thing of beauty is a joy for ever;
Its loveliness increases."

Years afterwards I stood by his grave, musing on the epitaph he himself desired should be placed there—"Here lies one whose name was writ in water." But of this hereafter: that quiet cemetery beneath the shadow of the ancient pyramid of Caius Cestius is hallowed ground to me now—none on earth fairer or holier. I come back to that Sunday evening in St. Hilda's Church, when, alone within the shadowy gloom of the dim old chancel, with the faint light just revealing the form of the sculptured knight on his silent marble couch, with shield and buckler by his side, and his "mailed hands" meekly uplifted, as if in voiceless prayer; with faded banners

—trophies of the fashion of this world that passeth away—drooping idly and dust-laden, high over the stately tomb; with the shadows deep and wide on the mouldering marble pavement; and beyond the screen, pillar and aisle and arch all blending in one sweet, solemn vision, the grander and the vaster for the dusky light, that left in total darkness the remote recesses of the building—I, like the lovely Madeline of the imperishable poem, knelt down “for Heaven’s grace and boon,” and then vowed myself to the new life, whose solemn beauty filled my heart to overflowing. I vowed to be a faithful daughter of “the Holy Catholic Church,” as I understood it and received it from the teaching of Mr. Beaufort; to her service would I devote myself; her ordinances should be my sustenance and my delight, her joy my joy, her grief my grief, her care my care, and her triumphs and victories mine also.

There I knelt, unseen by mortal eye, in the same spot where, a few hours earlier, I had knelt to commemorate the dying love of my Redeemer, and yet in my heart was no gush of love towards *Him*, no dedication to *His* service, no laying of my burden at His feet, no taking up of His cross, no yearning to see Him “face to face.” I was to all intents and purposes a heathen; for I was worshipping an idol—not indeed a graven image, or a mortal creature, too passionately loved—but an ideal god of my own vain, deluded imagination.

It has struck me since, that to uphold the unscriptural dogma of baptismal regeneration involves a breach of the first commandment, “Thou shalt

have no other gods beside me." Let us see how this charge is proved. It is *written*, that none can forgive sin but God *alone*; that there is but "one Mediator," an Advocate with the Father; one way, one truth, one life. So that if baptismal waters cleanse from sin, they must surely be divine; they stand in the place of Christ himself, who came to deliver us from the just penalty of our unrighteousness. Even when explained with subtle address, this dogma fails to approve itself to candid minds; since if only original sin is washed away by baptism, and actual sin by that blood which cleanses us from *all sin*, surely there is no longer *one* sacrifice for human guilt, but there are two ways by which the sinner must return to his lost purity.

That night was certainly an era in my history; it was the setting in of a great darkness, that gradually grew thicker and deeper, till it was a darkness that might be felt. I was completely enthralled, and in this new path I was unconsciously still seeking the happiness and the rest that I yearned to call my own. Did I find happiness or "rest unto my soul?"

No, no. Four years passed away, and I bent all my energies, and strung every nerve and sinew of my physical and mental nature, to the perpetual service of the sanctuary. I prayed—alas! not to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the God of all grace—I fasted, I wept, I fed the hungry, I clothed the naked, I taught the ignorant and the young; no day passed in which I did not join in all the services of my Church; no festival passed

by unheeded; no ordinance was neglected, or participated in without long and heedful preparation. I went on my way, in the eyes of ^fall men, blameless; my friends revered me; I was a burning and a shining light in the little Anglican church-going community of St. Hilda's. But within, all was void, and weariness, and secret pain. I was the slave, not the child of religion; a trembling servant in the court of the Gentiles—not a trusting disciple in the sanctuary itself, beholding Him by faith who ought to have been my chief joy and my only hope of eternal life. I was loved in my home at St. Hilda's; I was as a sister to the elders of the house; Lucia grew up, under my care, into a lovely young woman, and her affectionate respect and gratitude were dear to my heart: *but I was not happy*, for a few gleams of ecstatic excitement, followed ever by a deeper sadness, do not merit to be called happiness. At the end of the four years, Lucia went to join her cousins, who were at school in Germany. She was to remain abroad only one year, or at the utmost a year and a-half, and she insisted upon my coming back to her, on her return, that we might read together all that we had originally planned. And so I left my home at St. Hilda's, and prepared myself to enter on new scenes and new duties. Should I ever find truer, kinder friends than the Beauforts; and should I ever be happy? By this time I cried to myself—

"O happiness not to be found,
Unattainable treasure, adieu!"

CHAPTER XXXI.

ERICA.

She was a phantom of delight
When first she gleamed upon my sight;
A lovely apparition, sent
To be a moment's ornament;
Her eyes as stars of twilight fair;
Like twilight's, too, her dusky hair;
But all things else about her drawn
From May-time, and the cheerful dawn;
A dancing shape, an image gay,
To haunt, or startle, and waylay;
A creature not too bright or good
For human nature's daily food;
For transient sorrow, simple wiles,
Praise, blame, love, kisses, tears and smiles.

WORDSWORTH.

I WENT home to Myrtle Cottage, where I had not been for many months, and there I found sundry momentous changes impending. Susan's pupils were so numerous that the house would not hold them, and she had just arranged her plans, with another young lady, her intimate friend, who was to join her in the work of education, in a house of their own; and very busy they both were, preparing for this new home, which was in a very eligible situation, and perfectly adapted to the requirements of a first-class boarding-school. Moreover, an event was going to happen that I long had hoped might come to pass. Mrs. Corder and my father were to be married before Susan's departure for her new re-

sidence, and before I could be allowed to undertake any other situation. Indeed, both my father and my mother-in-law elect wished me now to remain at home; there was no longer an actual necessity for my earning my own living; but I would not consent. I had acquired habits of independence and self-reliance, and, besides, I did not like to be so far behind Susan in the race; so I agreed to stay quietly at Myrtle Cottage through the winter, and, in the spring, look out for a fresh engagement. A little before Christmas, the wedding took place, and the newly-married pair went away to Dover, leaving Susan and myself the sole occupants of the cottage for nearly three weeks.

During this period, my sister and I held many deeply interesting conversations, particularly on religious subjects, and I could not but discover that her sentiments and mine differed very widely. In fact, we scarcely seemed to find any one article of faith on which we were fully agreed; and had not Susan's temper been the sweetest in the world, we should certainly have embittered our short re-union with hard words and recriminations, almost, if not quite, amounting to an actual quarrel. One thing, however, I could not disguise from myself—Susan's religion made her contented and happy, while mine, though as tenaciously held as ever, was actually a burden, and gave me neither strength of mind nor peace of heart. I forced myself to believe that I was right and she was wrong; but I found it a hard matter to do so when, day after day, I saw her calm,

bright face, that seemed always looking to some sure, though unseen, source of satisfaction and joy; and day by day felt my own weariness of everything, and sometimes of everybody, on earth. Away from Mr. Beaufort and St. Hilda's the spell that had been laid upon me waxed weaker, the thralldom I had invited and clung to most lovingly seemed insensibly to be passing away, and, before I knew it, my confidence was severely shaken—before I left my father's roof it was absolutely gone.

When my father and Mrs. Kendrick returned, Susan left us for her own house, and very soon afterwards, before the chilling blasts of winter had given place to the genial airs of spring, we had the inexpressible delight of welcoming back our darling Rose, and her husband, and four children, who had been born to them during their sojourn in Australia. Rose was bonnier than ever; she still looked quite young, but her aspect was matronly, and her deportment staid, as became the mother of three daughters and a baby-boy, the like of whom had never existed in all the chronicles of babydom! The Ravens settled down in the neighbourhood, to the great joy of my father and his new wife; I paid them a brief visit in their pleasant home, and then I began seriously to consider what steps I should take towards forming a fresh engagement; for notwithstanding all that Mrs. Kendrick said to dissuade me, I still remained stedfast to my purpose of returning to governess life. It was May before I succeeded in suiting myself, and then it was through

the kindness of some of my friends at St. Hilda's, that I found myself engaged as governess to the only child and heiress of Lord Thirlmere. All arrangements were made in town, with the Earl's sister, who had undertaken to provide her little niece with a suitable instructress; I was to reside at Grange Castle, one of his lordship's seats in the North; the salary was most liberal, and everything that could conduce to my comfort, and enhance the position I was to hold, seemed to be duly considered.

I liked the idea of going into the North once more. Devonshire had been very fair and pleasant to me, but my heart yearned after mountains, real solemn mountains, such as I had seen on the horizon, when, at Lunechester, I had sometimes gone a few miles up into the moorland country. One glorious evening towards the end of May, 1847, I found myself entering the lodge-gates of Grange Park.

O! the beauty that burst upon my enraptured sight—surely of all the parks in Christendom that was the fairest! It was extremely undulating—now sinking in deep dells, watered by tinkling rivulets, on whose rocky, shady banks grew many rare ferns and lovely mosses—now rising to a pleasant fir-crowned knoll, and now swelling into a lofty hill, its sides clothed with brushwood and splendid firs, and its top commanding a wide view of the surrounding country. Once the road crossed one of these knolls, and the carriage paused, that I might take a survey of the beauteous landscape that stretched around. There at my feet lay the greensward of

the park, with its herds of splendid cattle and graceful deer; its sheltered glades, its natural terraces, and its thicket-like woods; round the park, like a belt of living light, swept a clear, swift-flowing river, spanned by an ancient stone bridge; beyond that, the woods and meadows of the sloping ground; then the broad sands of the estuary, from which the tide was fast receding, shining and burning like molten gold, as the rays of the sinking sun fell on the ebbing waves, and on the cool, wet sand; then dark and stern, rising sheer out of the golden sea, stood forth the rugged cliffs that bordered the northern shore of the estuary; then a range of green hills, then a line of purpling fells, then another and another chain, each one loftier than the other; till, last of all, calm and majestic, soaring far into the deep blue heavens, already coloured with the rich hues of sunset, rose up the "everlasting hills," the glorious mountains of our own island home.

Since that hour I have travelled in distant lands—I have seen the glacier, and the ice-crowned peak; I have passed the awful gorge; I have crossed the Tyrol; I have dwelt beneath the shadow of the fair blue Appenines—but I here avow, that never has my eye rested upon more perfect beauty than that which met its enraptured gaze for the first time on that lovely May evening, more than fourteen years ago.

The park was very extensive, and we had entered by the furthestmost gate, but presently after we had descended the slope, from the summit of which I had

caught the view just described, the house came in sight. I was disappointed at first; it was a modern and not an ancient castle, and though a proud and lordly mansion, showed little of the feudal magnificence which I had hoped to behold.

But as I drew near the edifice, my attention was withdrawn from the building to a slight fairy-like figure, standing in an attitude of expectation on one of the terraces. It was the Lady Erica Heathfield—the little mistress of the Earl's broad lands and princely houses, and my future pupil. Never shall I forget the beaming face that met mine, the perfect grace, the high-bred simplicity that gave me welcome. Erica was really in her fifteenth year, though so slight, and diminutive in features, that she might have passed for a child of twelve. She was dazzlingly beautiful; anything so exquisite, so radiant, so pure, and, alas! so fragile, I had never imagined! From that hour I loved her; I took her to my inmost heart, and she became my idol! She filled the place that had been vacant ever since that mournful evening at Lunechester, when the earliest and best friend of my youth had passed away.

The Lady Erica and I dwelt for the most part alone in our stately home. The Earl was much in London, and we received no visitors; but we were very, very happy, and wished for nothing that was not within our reach. Yes! even *I* was happy, though I had no daily services, no friendly confessor, though the whole tenour of my life was changed from what it had been at St. Hilda's. I was intensely,

blissfully happy! Surely, at last, I had found what I had sought so long, so earnestly, and so entirely in vain!

A gentler pupil than my Erica never gladdened the heart of her governess; she was so loving, so docile, so respectful, so charmingly, scrupulously obedient, and yet, withal, so highly-gifted, so intelligent, so earnest, so devoted to every branch of study which she pursued. How pleasantly were our days passed, all through that long beautiful summer! What walks we took! What excursions we made! how we sketched, and botanized, and read, and practised! and how swiftly the weeks and the months rolled on, and the bright summer faded into mellow autumn, and the tender green that had clothed the woods when first I came to Grange Castle had deepened its hue, and tints of gold, and brown, and crimson, were stealing over the autumnal beauty of the woods!

As the season advanced, Erica became unwell. I took every possible care of her. I shielded her from every blast; I provided against every change of the atmosphere; I would not allow her to pursue her studies, further than was necessary for her recreation, for to her work was pleasure; and yet she did not improve; and I wrote to the Earl, who was absent in Scotland, telling him my uneasiness, and begging him to pay us a visit at Grange Castle. He responded immediately to my appeal; three days after my letter was penned, he arrived, and he thought even worse of Erica's health

than I had done myself. A physician was summoned, who confirmed all our fears, and it was decided that the invalid must be confined to the house through the winter, and be tended with all the care that the most thoughtful affection could devise. Alas! already I began to fear for my young cherished happiness: my life seemed bound up in Erica's, and hers, it seemed at times, was fast fading away. I devoted myself entirely to her, I played and sang for her, read to her, ransacked the garden and the green-houses for the flowers she loved so well, told her long tales of my own experience, and always lavished upon her the tenderness that might have been hers, had her mother yet lived. Ah! that mother had died in Erica's infancy—died of the same fatal, deceitful malady that now threatened the daughter. The Earl made my heart bleed when he told me, again and again, that my darling grew daily more and more like her mother.

At length, as the days grew shorter and colder, we thought we perceived a change for the worse; and the Earl resolved to go up to town by easy stages, and then, if the first physician deemed it advisable, spend the winter at Torquay, or Ventnor. Wherever Erica went, I was to go also. The dear girl clung to me with an ever-increasing affection, and my love for her was the devotion of my whole passionate nature. I felt that separation from her would, indeed, be agony—the bitterness of death itself! I could not endure to think of it as barely possible.

With a sad heart I made preparations for our

journey. Mournfully I gazed, as the time of our departure drew nigh, on the solemn mountains, and the grey, old fells, and the shining waters, or the bright, wet sands of the estuary. Mournfully I wandered from room to room, from gallery to gallery, lingering in every place where Erica had stood or sat; or, since her illness, lain on her couch; inexpressibly dear to me seemed those spots, and I felt a heavy foreboding that that which had been would never, never be again. I and my child, my Erica, my treasure, would return thither nevermore. Oh, how sad I felt! Yes, happiness was a mere illusion; one hour of joy was followed by weeks and months of dreariness and regret.

On a wild November day we bade adieu to Grange Castle; Erica was placed in the carriage by her father himself, and I had thought of every plan that loving ingenuity ever supplied for her ease and comfort through the journey, that I feared would be too much for her fast-sinking frame. O, my Erica!

We reached town, however, without any of my worst apprehensions being realized. For some days after our arrival, Erica seemed better, and I fondly fancied her in a fair way to recovery. The physicians who were consulted, however, thought little of this evanescent restoration, and declared that a warmer climate must be resorted to without delay, and Nice was chosen in preference to the Isle of Wight or South Devon.

To Nice, then, we journeyed; and under the mild, sunny skies of that fair Mediterranean shore, we trusted that our drooping flower would revive

and bloom anew. For a while it seemed as though our dearest hopes would be realized: Erica's step grew firmer; the delicate roses of her cheek were more constant and healthful; and her sweet eyes shone with a purer and clearer lustre than ever. Here she was no longer confined to the house; we spent hours in the pleasant garden belonging to the villa which the Earl had hired; and she seemed to inhale fresh strength and health from the soft breezes that, laden with the breath of orange and myrtle flowers, came stealing to the couch where the invalid reclined. How fair those days were! how blue was the sunny, tideless sea! how blue the distant mountains! how bright the evergreen woods! how gladsome the rippling of the little waves of the Paglion, whose sources were high up among those distant peaks, where the purple and golden lights seemed so lovingly to linger, morning, noon, and night! Fair, fair scene! fair as the vain hope that buoyed up our trembling, oftentimes sinking heart.

At length the time came—the time when the last faint hope died quite away. Our darling was going; care, nor climate, nor medicine availed; the decree had gone forth, and the hand of death was heavy on that fair smooth brow, that was so soon to be hidden from sight, beneath the emerald turf of that pleasant land. Rapidly she sank; and I prayed, and wept, and implored that this cup might pass from me. “Do what thou wilt, O God,” was the cry of my heart, “but take not away the light of my heart and the treasure of my soul.”

The end came. Gently and sweetly as she had

lived, my Erica passed away; the white eyelids closed, the pale cheeks sank, the last breath quivered on the colourless lips—all that remained of my darling was lifeless clay; and the Earl of Thirlmere was childless. In the English burying-ground at Nice we laid her to rest. A white marble cross marks the spot where the fair young Lady Erica—the white English Rose, as the Italians called her—sleeps in peace; violets and other sweet flowers grow there in abundance, and around her are the ashes of others, who, like her, left their native land in the vain hope of regaining lost health on that smiling southern shore. O! my Erica! my gentle northern flower, never, never will thy sweet memory fade from my heart! I trust one day to meet that beloved one once more, for she had a hope and a strength born from above, that I knew nothing of. No earthly teaching was her's; but she was taught of God in silence and in secret; and her last words were words of peace, and joy, and trust in Christ Jesus her Lord. Those last words, and that last smile, are with me still; and the little Bible, whose pages she loved so well, is still in my possession, and reckoned among my choicest treasures. I did not long remain at Nice after my Erica's death; the Earl went to Venice, and I took advantage of the first escort that presented itself to return to my own country.

Again it was spring, and the early flowers were budding; but the blossom of my life seemed cut off for ever; all my happiness had been centered in Erica, and she was gone, and I was desolate. Once

more I found myself at Myrtle Cottage, and Mrs. Kendrick petted me as if I had been her own child; my father and she seemed very happy, and I hoped that for him the clouds of earlier years would disperse, leaving the old age that would come by-and-by, serene and calm. There was news awaiting me; Rose had another little son, not a week old, only a trifle less wonderful than his brother. Susan's school was prospering beyond her most sanguine hopes, and Mrs. Winchester was dead. The poor lady had died as she had lived, clinging to her novels and her cribbage board, and anxious about her false ringlets, and her borrowed bloom, to the very last. She played at cribbage the night before she died, and relinquished the game only when the cards fell from her nerveless hands, and when her dim eyes refused any longer to discern diamonds from hearts, or clubs from spades. Strange to say, she left me a legacy of £50!

Nor did my good fortune rest here. The Earl, who had been most liberal to me during the whole period of my residence in his family, wrote to me shortly after my return home, enclosing a deed of gift, by which I became possessed of £100 a-year for my life; he made no excuse for this generous present; he called it "Erica's bequest." Lucia had meanwhile returned from Germany; but my heart was not again drawn towards St. Hilda's, and I resolved that my dearest pupil should be my last. Now that I was a lady of independent property, I would live quietly at home, with my dear father, and my good, kind step-mother, at Myrtle Cottage.

CHAPTER XXXII.

I APPEAR IN A NEW CHARACTER.

None but an author knows an author's cares,
Or Fancy's fondness for the child she bears.
Committed once into the public arms,
The baby seems to smile with added charms.
Like something precious ventured far from shore,
'Tis valued for the danger's sake the more.
He views it with complacency supreme;
Solicits kind attention to his dream;
And daily more enamoured of the cheat,
Kneels, and asks Heaven to bless the dear deceit.

COWPER.

At first, it seemed the acme of delight to have no settled occupation, no imperative duties; it was pleasant to come down in the morning, and know that the whole day was before me, to spend as I liked, without any anxiety for the future; any speculation on the character of my next situation; any hunting up and down the columns of newspapers, to see if the advertisements offered anything that seemed suitable and promising. But after awhile, the sense of leisure lost its charms: I really had nothing to do. Mrs. Kendrick kept house so thoroughly, and was so excellent a manager, that there was little or no employment for me in that direction: I loved to go and see Rose's little children, but I was in nowise inclined to enact the benevolent maiden aunt; and though I might have been of essential service to Susan, it

never occurred to me to exert myself for her benefit. Sunday-school teaching and Dorcas-work had lost their interest; for I had left my religious enthusiasm, and all my High Church tendencies, at St. Hilda's; and when I had read all my favourite poets, and the best new novels, I really felt at a loss what to do next.

I tried study; but the stimulus was gone; I should never want to teach again. So far, languages and accomplishments had been my stock-in-trade; but now, the demand for them being at an end, they became almost useless lumber. And yet it was in making an attempt to go over some of my old exercises in Dante, that a new and brilliant idea broke suddenly upon me. I was comparing my own translation with Cary's, when it came into my head to try my hand upon original composition. Swift as lightning came before me the blue tideless sea, the orange groves, the fair jasmine stars, the distant shadowy Alps, the lovely winding coast, and the soft sunlight glancing on the waves of the Mediterranean, and on the rippling eddies of the impetuous little Paglion—all that was serene and beautiful in that far southern land, where my Erica lay at rest beneath the fragrant sod.

I seized a sheet of paper, and wrote for several hours, carefully revising the whole, before I made my fair copy. I called my poem "Erica's Grave;" and when I read it over, as a finished composition, I wept over the pathos of my own lines, and wondered that I had never before discovered my poetical capabilities. From that hour I was seized with a mania for composition: I wrote both prose and verse

unceasingly; and I am sure in the course of a few weeks I must have achieved enough to fill several good-sized volumes. Whether the quality in any way matched the quantity of these, my earliest literary attempts, I will not say—authors, you know, are like flesh and blood parents, and see beauties and graces in their own offspring where more impartial eyes fail to discern them. At length it occurred to me, or else Mrs. Kendrick suggested, that I should try to get some one to publish what I had written; and the desire of rushing into print having once possession of my mind, it was only to be allayed by gratification. I sat down accordingly, and reviewed all my MSS. from beginning to end; and I saw clearly that I had made no small advance since I first began to write. “Erica’s Grave,” as a composition, was very faulty, and some of the stanzas were weak, and others forced; while my last scribble—as yet only a mere foul copy—was decidedly the most original and the most carefully-finished thing I had yet produced.

I determined to set out on a new track; I would write a tale—not a very long one, but as full of incident, as full of power, as *piquante*, and as perfect as my poor brain and hand could make it—and I would send it to one of the leading magazines. I followed out my intention; and I wrote a much longer and more elaborate story than I had at first planned; and when it was quite finished, I read it over, in strictest confidence, and as a great favour, to Mrs. Kendrick, in the privacy of my own chamber,

which, however, was fast assuming the character of a literary studio. My step-mother was delighted, enchanted, and astonished; she cried and laughed by turns, and lost her temper when the maid tapped at the door to say she was wanted by some unreasonable butter-woman in the kitchen. Then she came back again, eager for the winding-up of the tale, and was only grieved that I had not made it twice as long. She was sure the editor would only be too glad to accept it; it would make the magazine a thorough success; and as soon as it appeared, other editors and publishers would inundate me with petitions for contributions, and with proposals for new works. I listened, and half-believed, half-ridiculed my sanguine step-mother. How she kept the secret from her husband, I cannot imagine; but keep it she did, like an honourable woman.

So I packed up my precious MS., duly directed and stamped it, and, with tender reluctance, committed it to the care of the General Post-office. Two days afterwards, I received a polite note from the editor; my MS. had been received, and it should have his earliest attention.

I had nothing to do now, but to wait, in a perfect agony of suspense, for the editorial verdict; and I scarcely knew how I should have managed to exist during the interval, had not my invaluable step-mother suggested that I should write another tale, in order to be ready for the demand which would ensue, as soon as the first contribution should appear. I took her advice, as I generally did, and in this

case it did me essential service; for my mind was soon absorbed in my new work, which I hoped to make far more vigorous and telling than my elder unfledged bantling; and I really forgot to be anxious and cross, as day after day passed by, and no answer came to me from the editorial sanctum.

At length, one morning, when I had only a chapter or two to write of my new story, the letter arrived, which was to decide my fate as an authoress. I knew the handwriting again; I hardly dared to open the envelope;—O! why had I been so sanguine, so foolishly conceited as to imagine that *I*—poor, unknown Millicent Kendrick—could produce anything fit to grace the pages of *that* magazine—the leading serial of the day! I unfolded a sheet of note-paper, and saw that the editor had been rather brief; and feeling as sick as possible, I was trying to acquaint myself with the contents by a desperate glance at the whole, when something clean, and pink, and pretty dropped down at my feet. It was a cheque—I will not tell you for how much, lest any of my literary readers should wonder that it was for so insignificant an amount; or else be angry, that their first attempt did not prove equally lucrative. I gave a shriek, that brought Mrs. Kendrick in terror from the kitchen; but when she saw that cheque—what a pretty pink thing it was!—she fairly cried for joy, and I cried with her, till, having shed as many tears as could be reasonably expected, we bethought ourselves of the editorial communication, which I had only partially perused.

Better and better! not only was my MS. unhesitatingly accepted, and a cheque enclosed; but there was a request, that for the next year I would forward a monthly contribution to the magazine, and terms were proposed, which both Mrs. Kendrick and myself thought extremely handsome.

Then came the divulging of the precious secret to my father and sisters. Rose and William were coming to take tea at the cottage some afternoon next week, and it was arranged that my brother-in-law should be asked to read aloud for the benefit of the ladies, who were to be engaged with their needlework; and, of course, my own production, which would then be in print, was to be placed in his hands. We were to hear the unbiassed opinions of the whole party, and then to intimate that the author was present—and then, of course, to receive congratulations.

In two or three days the magazine came out, and I need not say that I went to town on the very first of the month, and provided myself with several copies. O, the dear delight of first seeing one's self in print! O, the rush of parental emotion that quickens the pulse, and thrills through all the blood, when, for the first time, the conception of one's own brain has become a veritable existence, and stands there before one's eyes—not in a dream, but actual, visible, and real—ready and willing to be read and admired of all men.

And, then, one's *first book*—the eldest child of one's mind—the first-born of one's intellectual

nature. Ah! ye men and women who know nothing of the joys and sorrows of authorship, ye cannot conceive of the tumult of the author's soul when, fresh from the publisher's, lies, in all the glories of unsullied binding, the virgin type before him, which without him had never been. Ye can no more understand the soft emotions and the animated thrill which runs through all his veins than the childless woman can comprehend the mysterious bliss of first maternity.

Well, the eventful evening came, and Rose, and William, and Susan were all present; likewise my father, who was somewhat inclined to demur at the proposal of reading aloud. He wanted to talk with William Ravenel about some revelation which had taken place respecting the obnoxious Spanish marriage between the Infanta and the Duc de Montpensier, with which all London was then ringing. Some private papers written by Louis Philippe to his daughter, the Queen of Belgium, had been brought to light, and were now published. But my step-mother would have her way, and she reasoned and coaxed, and pretended to be cross, till the point was gained; and William sat down, and read out the title of the story, which Mrs. Kendrick silently indicated. O! how hot I felt, and then how cold! and—I had never been afflicted with heart-disease, but surely these palpitations were indicative of some very serious malady. But as William proceeded I grew calmer; I saw that no one had any suspicion of the truth, and I sat and stitched away with the

rest, and looked up now and then, as if anxious to know what was coming. Once or twice though, when William made an intonation which did not quite accord with my meaning, I nearly betrayed myself, for I was on the point of giving him the cue, which I thought he wanted. But on the whole, my brother-in-law did me full justice; and, as the tale unfolded, there were nods of approval from my father, satisfaction in the short remarks of my sisters, and unmistakeable enthusiasm in the voice of the reader. It ended; and then there was full discussion for nearly ten minutes; and Rose voted it "a beautiful thing;" and Susan said it was so charming, and yet so high-toned, that she thought she might read it to her young people; and William said "there was backbone in it, as well as sentiment—no trash, no vapouring." My father took off his glasses, and, turning to his wife, said, "Thank you, my dear, for overruling my objections. I have never enjoyed an hour more thoroughly. Pray let us have the magazine next month; perhaps there will be another article from the same pen."

Then I knelt down at my father's feet, and, hiding my face on his knees, as if I were a bashful girl, confessing my first love, I whispered to him—"Yes; there will be another tale next month, by the very same writer, and a better one than this."

"Eh! what! speak up!" cried my father, trying to raise my head. "What do you mean? What do you know about it? Here's a pretty kettle of

fish, Mrs. Kendrick; and you put it on the fire, remember. Here's Milly knows the author, and we have been discussing the thing, and turning it upside down, as if it had been written by somebody that lives at Bherring's Straits, or in Central Africa. Cunning Milly! But we said nothing very bad, did we? It's a right good tale, if I am any judge, and you may tell your friend I said so."

"It is not exactly a *friend*, father—something nearer than a friend."

"Nearer? Then it must be a relative;" and he looked round at the surprised faces of his younger daughters, and then at his wife, and then at his son-in-law; he saw at a glance that they were innocent of the charge; and he cried, "Surely, child, you are not married! you have no clever husband behind the scenes—surely not?"

"Surely not," I answered, half-laughing at the idea, and yet half-crying too. "Papa, it is myself. I wrote it—your own Milly wrote this tale, that you like so much."

I hardly know what followed: Mrs. Kendrick poured forth a volume of explanation, and gave the history of my literary career from beginning to end; she was as triumphant as if she had been crowned queen quite unexpectedly—dear, good, excellent step-mother! And to think how I once hated "that Mrs. Corder!" I was kissed, and hugged, and praised, and wondered at, till I was hardly certain of my own identity. O, a pleasant thing is praise, especially from those who are nearest

and dearest! William brought us down from the heights of ecstasy, by pretending to be very much afraid of me, and asking to see my stockings, that he might know whether blue hose was really as unbecoming as it was generally asserted to be. Finally, Mrs. Kendrick implored us to come to supper, and over our fowl and tongue and currant tart—there was quite a feast in honour of the occasion—we grew rational again, and I began to feel once more like Millicent Kendrick of Myrtle Cottage. From that day my reputation in the literary world was established, and it grew and grew, till I found myself quoted as “that popular writer,” “that celebrated novelist,” “that charming author.” As Mrs. Kendrick had predicted, I had many applications from divers publishing and editorial firms; but I declined all proposals, and wrote only for the magazine in which I had so happily made my *début*. And I did this because I had no intention of frittering away my powers on various serials; for I was now engaged on my first *book*, which would never grace the pages of any magazine. Articles in magazines are all very well to begin with, and they are satisfactory enough in their way; but a “self-contained” book, a volume of which one has to correct the proofs, sheet by sheet, is the pride and glory of an author’s heart: it is so compact, so durable, so individualized, as it were, that it becomes on the instant infinitely more precious than those scattered papers, which may, or may not, in the course of time, be gathered up from North to

South, to be elevated to the dignity of a separate publication.

That first *book* was a complete success; and if the wreath of fame and the pleasures of intellectual society could confer lasting happiness, then had I indeed found the source of womanly content. But no! the voice of praise was sweet enough; but presently it became a mere matter of course; and when the excitement had subsided, and the novelty of composition had worn off, I felt once more the old pain, the old restless craving, the striving, the yearning for some hitherto undiscovered and unimagined good. I had tried nearly everything: gaiety, kindred love, study, hard labour, religion—at least I *fancied* that I had tried religion, I ought to have said Puseyism—friendship, love—such as I had borne my lost, lovely Erica—foreign travel, easy circumstances, rest after toil, and now the charmed cup of fame. And still there was the void, the blank, the dim, confused perception of a happiness purer, fuller, nobler, and sweeter than any I had ever yet tasted—a happiness that would shine around my path like the clear, bright evening star—not like the meteor, that dazzles with its splendour, only to deepen the gloom of the fast-succeeding darkness.

Outwardly I was in excellent spirits; for I went a great deal into society, and I had many new friends, and money flowed in upon me, and my own relations were so proud of me that they could never pet me enough.

That year—the year in which I first appeared before the world as an author—was to be the **great** era of my life: not the period of my leaving school to find my father a ruined man, not the day when I became an inmate of the Castle House was half so momentous as that year was fated to be before it drew to its close. I was now twenty-seven years of age and upwards; my birthday was in June, and now it was the very end of November, and I was beginning to feel quite an old maid. Rose was surrounded by five little darlings of her own: Susan, too, was recently engaged—no wonder that people began to set me down as doomed to a life of single blessedness and books. My love affairs, which really did not at all merit the name, had been few and insignificant. Sir Rowland Lindale's offer was the only one of any account. Gus Pepper had indeed favoured me with an amatory communication soon after my departure from his father's roof, but half a dozen trenchant lines closed that correspondence for ever. (By the way, the Peppers affected literary society now; they held *soirées* and *conversaziones*, and they wanted to exhibit me as a lion at their evening parties: of course I would not go.) Then there were two curates at St. Hilda's: one, a mediæval saint, with vulnerable—nay, sensitive—affections; and the other, cool, impudent, and ready to eat any amount of dirt, if only the eating thereof might haply conduce to preferment. To neither of the curates did I at all incline.

No, my heart was free. Strange, yet true: believe

it or not, as you like, O, impressible damsels of sweet seventeen, or maturer eighteen! I had never loved, as we women say! No, the great deeps of my heart had never been stirred; my soul had never encountered its twin; I had never seen the man to whom I could say—"I will go with thee to death: I will look first for thy face when, on the resurrection morning, I rise from the dust. I take thee for my earthly master, my king, my *world*!"

But the time was coming—nay, it was come—when—but I must leave all that for my next chapter: I will tell you, presently, all about it: till another time, adieu.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

THE LAST DAYS OF SPINSTERHOOD.

Though for myself alone
I would not be ambitious in my wish,
To wish myself much better; yet, for you,
I would be trebled twenty times myself,
A thousand times more fair, ten thousand times
More rich;
That only to stand high in your account,
I might in virtues, beauties, livings, friends,
Exceed account.

SHAKSPERE.

It was the second of December, and snow was on the ground, and I was engaged to spend the evening at the house of a certain Mrs. Montague Everard, one of my new literary friends, who lived in the favoured regions of Belgravia. It was to be rather a stylish party, and I took some pains in dressing, and ordered my cab in good time. How well I remember that evening's toilet! I have still the dress I wore there, and I shall always keep it as a relic of past time. It was a French *barège*, pink and white, and so soft and fine that I could roll it up into a parcel without damaging it; one shake, and the beautiful material fell into its natural folds, and the flounces seemed fresh from the hand of the milliner. One of my neighbours had sent me an exquisite bouquet, and a lovely rosy camellia for my hair: thus I was most satisfactorily equipped.

I suppose the snowy night, and several entertain-

ments in the neighbourhood, made the cabmen very busy, for I had to wait some time before my carriage made its appearance, and I began to fear I should be terribly late, when I had faithfully promised to be very early. It came at last, and I drove away through the whitened lanes, and along dingy streets—all the dingier for the begrimed, polluted snow—till we came to the West End, where cleanliness and order once more prevailed.

As I write this, I recall my thoughts during the drive; I like to remember everything that I felt and saw that evening. I passed by squalid houses, where wretched children were wailing, and miserable mothers scolding; where no gladsome fire-light cast its ruddy glow through the uncurtained pane; where poverty, and disease, and dirt, and woe held triumphant sway. Then I passed on to other houses, where the rich made merry, and light was flashing from the many windows, and liveried servants were at the threshold, and carriage after carriage rolled up, discharging its freight of youth, and beauty, and fashion, and rank. As I contrasted what I had just left with what I now saw, I began to moralize and philosophize to myself; and mentally I put it all down in an imaginary note-book, which I carried—as all authors do—in my memory, ready to be reproduced, as background, or foreground, or scenery of some sort, in some future chapter, as yet unplanned. I thought, too, of my own estate, not sordid and miserable on the one hand, and not wealthy and noble on the other. And yet I was

much richer than I had ever been before, and I was my own mistress, and the great world petted me; and though I was not of lofty lineage, or the child of unbounded luxury, I mingled now freely and on equal terms with those who were entitled by birth and breeding to all the privileges of rank and fortune. And as I mused thus, there came into my mind that old familiar hymn that everybody knows, because everybody learns it in the nursery:—

“Not more than others I deserve,
But God has given me more.”

But my gratitude was not of the right kind; it was a mere heathenish acknowledgment of the benefits of a propitious Deity; it was not the spontaneous glow of a truly pious heart, thanking the Father of all mercies for “creation, preservation, and all the blessings of this life.” Presently we came to the square where Mrs. Montague Everard lived; and I looked out, and saw the snow on the shrubs in the central garden, that belonged to all the houses; and I saw the moonbeams bright and clear on the whitened roofs and parapets of the noble mansions in the square; and then we stopped, and Mrs. Everard’s servants were assisting me to alight.

It was late—later even than I thought—and my hostess came forward, at once greeting me and chiding me for my tardiness. I explained, and then she passed my arm within hers, and led me into an inner drawing-room, which was only open to her guests on nights when she wished to form small

literary groups among her most favoured and favourite friends. In this small room were several persons sitting. I remember only two: one was Miss King, a scientific elderly lady, and nearly related to Mrs. Everard; the other—but I had never seen him before, though the name of the poet Eric Etherington was by no means unfamiliar. We were introduced, and Miss King being called away by a celebrated geologist, Mr. Etherington and I were left to sustain the conversation alone. We might have been acquainted all our lives, so speedily and so freely did we glide from one topic to another, so animated was our discourse, and so similar were our theories, our predilections, and our ideas of things in general. I sat like one in a dream, listening to the deep music of a voice that seemed to echo every thought and feeling of my own soul: I drank in from that glorious intellect, that noble heart, such draughts of the purest mental enjoyment, and the keenest appreciation of a kindred spirit, as few, I suppose, have ever experienced. I had never known, never before imagined, such communion of soul and mind. I was in a new world, and a new life was opened to me.

But I could not sit there all the evening, however much I might desire it. I had become public property, and I must pay the penalty which every man and woman incurs, who chooses to run the risk of popularity. There were many who wished to talk to me; some few who wished me to talk to them; and some, again, who were requesting an introduction. Then it looked particular to affect the

company of one person alone, and that person a gentleman little older than myself; and as it was, I did not escape the annoyance of banter, which, though not unkindly meant, and the mere result of thoughtless habit, gave me a feeling of intense pain. Mrs. Everard rallied me upon the impression which, as she said, Mr. Etherington and myself had made upon each other; and then she called that calm, beautiful season of intercourse "an hour of literary flirting." Flirting, indeed! I shook with indignation. No true woman cares to be accused of flirting: the frivolous, the vain, the contemptible, and—yes, I will say it—the *indelicate* woman flirts; the pure-hearted, high-toned gentlewoman, be she sixteen or forty, abhors and despises flirtation, even in its mildest forms. Flirting, indeed! and with *him*! Had I been accused of waltzing over those graves in the cemetery, where my mother and her children lay at rest; had I been charged with polking up and down the aisles of Westminster Abbey, my feelings could not have been more shocked, my scorn more vehement.

But I learned a lesson: if to the pure all things are pure, there are conventionalities to be respected, and a woman is never safe who sets at nought the opinion of society. There are many artificial barriers between the sexes, which are doubtless very stupid and very unnecessary, and sometimes they are most tiresome and galling; yet, on the whole, I suppose, we should not, as a people, be one whit the better or the happier if they were taken

with Mr. Beaufort, and had opened to him what my wife had entreated me, "all my heart." It was on the Saturday evening that this conversation took place. I believed Mr. Beaufort to be from home, but he had been called from the tea-table to go in to baptize a dying child; and I went into the study to look for a book, that Mrs. Beaufort had so highly commended me to peruse. I entered without knocking, and there, to my extreme consternation, I found Mr. Beaufort, busied, I suppose, with his sermon for morrow. I was retreating in the utmost haste, murmuring an apology as I went, when he called me back. There was something so mild and so respectful in his tones, that it was impossible to me to refuse to hear was to obey.

Accordingly, I returned, and he begged pardon for what I wanted. I told him, again making excuses for apparent rudeness; but he bade me say no more about it; I was welcome in every part of the house, and especially in this, where books were always open to my selection, and himself at my disposal. And this he said standing, with the same polished courtesy to me, his hired servant, as to any other lady of his acquaintance. He then went to the shelves, sought out the book I named, and placed it in my hands. I thanked him, and was going away, when he said, "Miss Kendrick, am I right in believing that you wish to have a conversation with me on religious subjects?" I stood it to be so, from Mrs. Beaufort."

I murmured an assent; and he continued

reverted to the conversation of the evening before, and I wondered, with a strange feverish restlessness, when I should see my new friend again. That we should meet again, and before long, I never doubted: I felt, though I could not tell why, that he would never rest till we met once more; and I was right. In the course of a day or two, he came to see me, bringing me as a sort of excuse his last volume of poems, which had that day issued from the press. I was at home that evening, and he staid till very late, delighting my father and Mrs. Kendrick, and filling my heart with an undefinable sense of happiness and quiet content, that it had never known before. When he went away, the house seemed emptied of something, and I only wished to be alone again, and meditate on all that had passed. How well we seemed to know each other, how unreserved we both were, and yet how recent our intimacy! It was all very strange, but very pleasant.

Well, I have neither time nor inclination to write about the progress of our friendship; nor how friendship rapidly became something closer and sweeter; nor how, one day, the whole truth flashed out, and we knew that we loved one another, and that, come weal or come woe, our lives from henceforth must be bound up in one.

Ah! now my cup of bliss was full—no, not yet full; it would be better and sweeter still when I became Eric's wife. But in the meantime I was quite content: it was enough to see him day by day, to hear his voice, to receive his confidence—

the confidence of one of the highest and noblest spirits that ever was tabernacled in mortal clay—to read together, walk together, lay plans together for the blessed future that was coming, even to keep silence together, knowing that he was mine, and I was his.

Yes, those days were blissfully happy; and at last, as I believed, my heart had found its rest. Alas! I was seeking in the creature what alone can be found in the Creator. But no misgiving then overshadowed my joy. Had all the men in the world been brought before me, that I might choose my husband, I should have chosen him, without a thought or a care about any other; and had he not chosen me, and was I not his choice? O, happy, thrice-blessed Millicent Kendrick!

Ah! young ladies, who are engaged, and disengaged, and re-engaged twice or thrice over before you are twenty, you little know what you fritter and chip away, in those girlish, evanescent fancies. You little know the might and the depth and the glory of a woman's love: you will *never* know it! You cannot say,—

“We broke no gold, a pledge
Of stronger love to be;
But I wear his last look in my soul,
Which said, ‘I love but thee.’”

I wonder how a woman feels when she is loving—as *she calls it*—for the sixth or seventh time. Well, I do not know at all, and, what is more, I should not like to know: it is one of the things that must

be felt in order to be understood; and it is an experience I cannot covet. If I had a priceless diamond, a beautiful lustrous stone, without a flaw, I should like to give it to *one* friend—to give it in all its pristine purity and splendour. It would break my heart, if I had to splinter it up, in order to divide it among many. And the affection of woman, her true, wifely nature, is a jewel of inestimable value.

Eric had no relatives who had any right to interfere with his actions, and mine had nothing to say but what was propitious; there was no reason why our union should be retarded. So the wedding day was fixed for the middle of March, and very busy we were with our preparations, and short time there was for them; for it was arranged that one ceremony and one wedding-feast should serve two couples; Susan and I were brides together; she had given up her share in the school at Christmas.

Susan's betrothed—plain John Wilson—was not at all like my poet-lover; and I pleased myself often by making secret comparisons, that were, of course, entirely in favour of my own intended; as they would have been, had I compared him with all the princes and orators of the nineteenth century. But, for all that, John Wilson was a man of whom his wife might be justly proud; a man of good common sense, superior education, and real refinement. And there was another thing: he possessed that which my Eric did not—the one thing which he lacked—genuine piety. But I did not miss, in my affianced husband, that which I myself stood in need

of. If any one had told me that Eric was not a religious man, I should have indignantly replied that he was slandered; for he paid the greatest reverence to all the outward observances of religion, and his poetic enthusiasm, and highly developed veneration, I mistook for the spirit of fervent devotion.

And so the weeks glided on, and the days of my maidenhood were well-nigh ended, and hour by hour the stream of my happiness deepened and widened. We took a house in St. John's Wood; but Susan's more humble abode was in the old neighbourhood; she wished to be among her friends, and within reach of her father and the Ravensels. We were in a whirl of business from morning to night, for it is equally strange and true, that one never thinks of getting married without a vast amount of preparation. As for Mrs. Kendrick, she was entirely in her element; stitching away, with her newest spectacles on, planning the arrangement of guests at the inevitable breakfast after the ceremony; looking over old receipt-books, in search of information touching the cooking of unwonted delicacies. Now she was in our little greenhouse, fidgetting lest the cinerarias should not be in bloom for the important occasion; now she was measuring tables, and computing how many square inches must be allotted to one person. We had begun to swell out our petticoats then: it was the spring of 1849. We stuck ourselves out with corded moreen skirts, and horse-hair contrivances, that were the real *crinolins* after all; for I suppose crinoline comes, in some

way, from *crinis*, the Latin for *hair*. But hoops were not yet introduced, and no one thought of going about with enough steel on one's person to make a hundred or more watch springs. But don't imagine that I am railing at *crinolins*. I think the cry against it is as preposterous as the extravagance of dimension to which some women expand themselves. Tight stays are an abomination; but light French corsets, with elastic fastenings, are admirable. Oldenburg bonnets were ridiculous and unseemly, so are pork-pie hats; but bonnets and hats are very eligible head-dresses after all. Why cannot people be moderate?

A *little* crinoline, unlike knowledge, is *not* a dangerous thing: a great deal is a provision for possible suicide. If rightly managed, and kept in due proportions, it keeps the hems of dresses from the ground; throws off a weight of clothing from the hips, and is an unspeakable convenience in muddy weather—if you do not go in an omnibus. Then I must confess that—well, “not to put too fine a point upon it,” as Mr. Snagsby would say—it is excessively inconvenient; and I wonder when the conductor demands his fare he does not say, “Fourpence please, mum, and twopence for your crinoline.” Still I do wish those gentlemen who rave so about crinoline were obliged to walk up and down Ludgate-hill, Fleet-street, and the Strand, across Trafalgar-square, and back again to St. Paul's, every day, for one week, with a bag or parcel in one hand, and an *umbrella* in the other, and half-a-dozen heavy,

wet, cold, muddy petticoats flapping against their heels and legs, and those legs no longer cased in broad-cloth and Wellingtons, but daintily arrayed in cotton or fine merino hose, and Paris kid and patent leathers. I *know* they would petition to be allowed to try a *little* crinoline.

I really do not know what made me write all this about crinolines; I suppose when I mentioned the spaces required at a wedding-breakfast, I involuntarily thought of the diminution of seats in Exeter Hall. Suppose the legislature were to tax crinolines instead of incomes, so much per inch beyond a certain given circumference, would it not be a good move? Is there no courageous M.P. who will be valiant enough to bring the measure forward? Think of the popularity of a Ministry who should abolish the income tax and abridge crinolines! There is only one objection to my plan—crinolines will in course of nature go out of fashion some time or other, but incomes never will.

All was nearly ready, when one morning, just a week before the important day, I received a letter from my old enemy Mrs. Susannah, once my Aunt Ryland's waiting woman. It was written in a strange cramped style, and begged me to come and see her without delay; she was dying, she said, and she had an important secret to disclose. I must make haste, there was no time to lose.

Of course I resolved to go; but I took my step-mother with me. Was the mystery of the missing will at last to be unravelled?

CHAPTER XXXIV.

MATRIMONIAL.

God, the best maker of all marriages,
Combine your hearts in one.

SHAKSPEARE.

IN a dark, sordid back street, turning out of another miserable back street, that had wandered by at least two turnings from the nearest respectable thoroughfare, was found the house indicated in the address furnished by Mrs. Susannah. The aspect of the street was anything but inviting, and the looks of the people who appeared to consider it as their own especial territory were anything but reassuring. Slovenly-looking men, begrimed with dirt, that was certainly not the honest dirt of labour; villainous-looking lads; women, whose every glance and movement made me shudder; and unhappy children who seemed equally unacquainted with wholesome food, clean water, and decency, thronged the broken pavement, or lounged in the doorways of their houses.

We stopped at the number mentioned in the letter, and inquired of a huge woman, who sat smoking her short pipe on the door-step, whether one Mrs. Susannah Perkins lived in that house. For the space of half a minute, she stared us out of countenance, vouchsafing no reply: then she rose

up to her full stature and dimensions—full six feet in height, and of corresponding breadth and bulk—and shouted up into the darkness of the darkest of well-staircases, and at the top of a terrible voice, “Sally! Sally Mudge! I say! bain’t there a ooman of the name of Perkins, up in the third-pair back?”

“There be a ooman as answers to that name, in the fourth-pair front—as sick a ooman as ever I clapped eyes on,” returned a shrill treble voice that was supposed to belong to the invisible Sally Mudge.

“Ah! the ooman with the cat!” responded the giantess, removing her pipe, and spitting in unpleasant vicinity to my nice merino dress. “Ye can go up; the fourth pair front, remember; and mind the holes in the boards, and the broken rail at the top of the third flight; and take care of the cat—that cat’s more than she seems to be!”

“A familiar spirit, I suppose,” said Mrs. Kendrick. “Thank you, Mrs.—”

“I aint no missis, nor no miss,” replied the giantess; “I’m just Big Biddy! I was riz in Cork town, along with pigs and praties; but I come here when I was five year old, and I’ve lost the brogue, and the ungenteel way, that the Irish mostly has. Now mind the holes: a gal got her foot in one last week, and twisted her hankle shocking; and if yer Christian women, give the cat a wide berth.”

Again we thanked Big Biddy, and commenced the ascent that seemed fraught with so much peril;

carefully groping our way, and looking out for pitfalls. We were aided, however, by Sally Mudge, who, living upon the first landing, threw open her door as we approached, and volunteered to conduct us to the top of the house. Under the guidance of Mrs. Mudge, we reached the topmost flight, and found ourselves before the door of Mrs. Susannah's room. We tapped, and a feeble voice bade us enter.

Yes, we were right; I had begun to doubt it. There, on a wretched, unclean-looking bed, wearing the raggedest of ragged shawls, and the most tattered of ancient night-caps, propped up by bundles, sat the well-remembered form of my ancient enemy. The room was nearly bare of furniture, and what few articles there were, seemed to be of the commonest description, and for the most part broken. On a chair by the bedside sat the redoubtable cat; huge, pink-eyed, and white from the nose to the tail; that is, she had no coloured hairs upon her, and she would have been white, had she lived in regions favourable to cleanliness.

As I put out my hand to accost Mrs. Susannah, the uncanny beast put out her paw, with malicious intent, and her mistress cursed her, in pretty plain terms, and bade her go down. It appeared the creature rejoiced in the name of Jezebel.

I have not time to write all that occurred, and all that passed between Mrs. Susannah and myself, so I must content myself with giving the pith of the conversation. Mrs. Susannah began by accounting for the lamentable state in which we found her :

she was married, it appeared; and she had fallen a prey to one of the greatest scoundrels, she declared, who ever disgraced the name of man. He had sought her only for the money which she was known to possess; and then, exercising the full prerogatives of a husband, had taken all her possessions into his own keeping, and, like the prodigal son, wasted her substance in riotous living.

Strange to say, in this most momentous epoch of her life, the characteristic prudence and sagacity of Mrs. Susannah quite deserted her. Love plays strange freaks sometimes; and I suppose the handsome, gallant man of thirty so captivated and enthralled the virgin affections of the maiden of fifty, that anything like a proper settlement was never dreamed of. She told us all this in a weak, wailing voice, that, as of old, set my teeth on edge; and she described to us the various ingenious methods in which her youthful spouse had contrived to make "ducks and drakes" of her property; how he had taken to a confectionery business at the West End, and how he had flourished himself about town, leaving on her hands the sole responsibilities of cakes and jellies; how the first quarter proved their expenses to be far larger than their profits, and how the confectionery business was summarily disposed of, and a billiard-room engaged, where something happened that was the very reverse of respectable; and then how the residue of her fortune was embarked in purchasing the good-will of a public-house—"going into the public line," Mrs. Susannah

called it; and how the landlord drank more than the guests, and gambled, and quarrelled, and took to prize-fighting, trying his hand, whenever exasperated, on his unfortunate wife; and behaving altogether very much like the swindling Count, who espoused the wonderful Miss Kilmansegg, of golden-leg memory. All this did the ill-starred Mrs. Susannah relate, cautioning me against ever committing matrimony, as if it were one of the capital offences forbidden in the Decalogue.

I began to think this was all I was to hear; when suddenly she changed her tone, and said, with an air of piteous deprecation, "But that wasn't what I wanted to say to you, Miss Kendrick—O! you cursed cat!" The last remark was addressed to Jezebel, who objected to my stepmother, and stood with back erect, and tail bristling, spitting and swearing at her. The cat, thus anathematized, retreated growling into a corner, and Mrs. Susannah proceeded—"Don't serve me out, Miss Kendrick; I know I've been a wicked creature; but I did poison your kitten because I hated you, for coming in between me and my mistress; and I did steal that will, and I've got it now, and if I restore it to you perhaps God will forgive me before I die."

"How was it, Mrs. Susannah?" I asked.

"I heard Mrs. Ryland telling you what she had put in the will, and where you were to look for it when she was gone. At first, I thought nothing of it, only I hated you more and more; but one night—I think it was three nights before my mis-

tress died—I was sitting up alone with her, for Nurse Dent was worn out—and the devil tempted me. Mrs. Ryland was asleep, and I knew she would not awake, for she had taken a strong composing draught; and I had seen where she kept her keys, and I could get them without disturbing her. Well, I took them—without any intention of doing what I did do, Miss Kendrick; and I soon found the key of the *secrétaire*, and I saw the drawer with the handle different from all the others, and I pulled it out—and there was the will. Then the thought came into my head, that if I took it away, you would not be able to prove your right to what your aunt left you, nor, indeed, make any claim; and so, to make matters short, I put it in my pocket and shut the drawer, and locked the *secrétaire*, and put back the keys. Then, afterwards, I was frightened; I trembled to think what I had done, and I wanted to put the will back; for I thought it would be sure to come out some day, and I didn't know but what it might be a hanging matter, or, at the least, transportation for life.

“But I never had the opportunity; and somehow, knowing how guilty I was, I shrank away from my mistress's room. I thought if I kept out of the road I might not be suspected: and when you found me in the dressing-room that morning, Miss Kendrick, I had gone there to try if I could not find some way of replacing the will. Then seals were put on everything, and I dared not tamper with them; and I was frightened to death at having the thing in my

possession, and yet something always hindered me from destroying it; so what do you think I did, Miss Kendrick? I knew the way into the haunted wing, as well as my mistress did, and I took it there and hid it in the old clavichord; and when they searched about, no one ever dreamed of going there. When I found out what a set the John Rylands were, I repented more than ever of what I had done; but I couldn't confess. If there had been only you, Miss Kendrick, I could have done it; but there was that Mr. Fennimore, and the doctor, and the clergyman, and that shrewd hard-looking little man, Mr. Reynell, that Mrs. John brought to back her up: and I was obliged to keep my secret, though it was eating my heart out. There it has been ever since, weighing me down, and holding me tight like an iron chain; and I've never prospered: and now I am dying and starving; and I want to see you righted, Miss Kendrick, and to hear you say you forgive me, and you hope God will too!

I replied that I forgave her freely: and then I inquired if the will were still in its hiding-place in the old Castle House.

"No," returned Mrs. Susannah, "I have it here. When I left the Castle House I took it away with me. I knew those Rylands would have the south wing pulled down, sooner or later. I never let my husband know aught about it; and I have always kept it safe and hidden. Here it is!"

And she drew out from under her bolster something carefully pinned up in an old yellow cambric

handkerchief, that made me think of old times, for on the corner was embroidered the well-known Ryland crest; and—yes! it was the long-lost will, with its inevitable red tape, and its seals unviolated: it had never been opened. Now, indeed, I might claim my own; and very glad I felt to think that I should go to my Eric as a well-portioned bride.

There were several things to be done:—First of all, Mrs. Susannah's deposition had to be repeated on oath, and Mr. Fennimore had to be once more consulted. The chain of evidence was composed of so few links, and was so essentially clear and complete, that it was vain to think of opposing my claim. Mr. Reynell acknowledged the will at once, and all that justice demanded was promptly ceded.

As for the wretched woman who had worked me this evil, she seemed infinitely relieved when the whole affair was settled. Of course, I had her removed to more respectable lodgings, and I took care that she should be supplied with all that her enfeebled condition required. She never saw her worthless husband again, and she died about three months after the surrender of the will. In her last illness she was repeatedly visited by one of our excellent city missionaries. I would fain hope that her death-bed was not all gloom and terror.

But ere this happened, I had become Eric's wife. My wedding-day was one of the most glorious days of that beautiful spring, and we had a goodly

company to the bridal; and Susan was married too; and great was the satisfaction of the inestimable Mrs. Kendrick. She worked like a slave to make Myrtle Cottage worthy of her two brides; and I am convinced that she was never more delighted than when utterly worn out in our service. How she did handle chairs, and tables, and dusters! How she did arrange and re-arrange! How busy she was with curtains, and table linen, and plates, and china, and silver, and glass! How she did sew, and help to "try on," and pack up, and write directions! And how strange it looked to see my new name, when as yet I had no right to it, legibly written on a trunk label—"Mrs. Eric Etherington!"

But the day came, and the hour; and I stood in the quiet country church, and heard the holy words that bound Eric and me together, "till death us do part." Even in that great joy of hope fulfilled, came the shadow of darkness. Was it *only* till death should part us? It might be years before the pale messenger came to either of us; but it might be only months, or weeks. I had heard of husbands and wives parted when their married life still wore all its first blissful beauty. I had heard of such things, and I trembled, and my heart grew faint at the thought of what *might* come and sever me and my Eric eternally.

As I stood there, with the spring sunlight on my veil and on my bridal flowers, I remembered one line of my favourite "Forest Sanctuary," and I

understood it, and accepted its significance as I had never done before:—

“It is a fearful thing to love what Death may touch!”

But when the last words of blessing had been spoken the shadow passed away, and I was the proud and happy wife of Eric Etherington.

We spent the first few weeks of our married life in Scotland. We visited Edinburgh; and then we went far away northwards, up into Caithness; and one bright, warm morning we actually crossed Pentland Firth, and set foot on the Orkney Islands, that had always seemed to me mere abstract geographical definitions rather than actual insular territories!

It was high summer when we came back again, and I took possession of my beautiful new house in St. John's Wood. But on our journey southward we paused at Lunechester, that I might behold once more the scenes of other days, and pay visits to such of my friends as yet remained. Ah! the dear old Castle House: it was completely metamorphosed, changed into a modern mansion, with all the newest improvements. The south wing, the old chapel, the orchard, were all gone; and in all the spick-and-span glories of modern architecture, pinnacled, and verandahed, and radiant with untarnished paint, rose up the new, scarcely-finished “Priory-terrace.”

First of all, we called upon the Rev. Mr. Broadway, the rector of St. Beetha's. He was stouter and more rubicund than of yore, and he informed us that he had just engaged an extra curate, and

"meant to take life easy." How he *could* take it more easily than he used to do, I could not imagine. He was very polite, congratulated me on the recovery of my fortune, and complimented me upon the fame I had won in the literary world. As for my marriage, words failed him wherewith to express his delight and his supreme felicity in the contemplation of my happiness. Eric did not like him at all; he called him a drone in the hive, and compared him to the owls and bats that tenanted the ancient tower of his church. Poor Mr. Broadway! and he had evidently been trying to impress my husband with due reverence for his clerical responsibilities, and to win the admiration of the poet whom the world was beginning to honour. Poor Mr. Broadway!—poor in every point of view that did not include sumptuous dinners, marvellous port and Burgundy, the *Times* newspaper, after-dinner naps, and Currer Bell's new novel.

We spent a pleasant day with the kind Rushtons: they were little changed, scarcely a day older in appearance than when I saw them last, and as kind, as simple, as hospitable, and as light-hearted as ever. They made much of me and Eric—a real live author and authoress, whose works they had read and cried over—to say nothing of my claim upon them as an old and valued friend.

Nurse Dent was still living, but she was away from Lunechester. Deeply I regretted the impossibility of seeing my excellent friend, and introducing to her my noble husband. When next—some years after—

wards—I visited Lunechester, she was gathered to her rest.

Last of all, we went to Kirkby-Hutton, and there, in the little grey church, I stood by the stone that covered the mortal remains of my beloved aunt. Ah! she was not there; only the worn-out garment of the flesh.

Then we went home; and I found myself the centre of a brilliant circle, and—what was far better—an idolized wife. One day, I met Sir Rowland Lindale, and the acquaintance was renewed: ah! how thankful I was to be Eric's wife, and not his! What was he by the side of my noble, gifted Eric!

Depend upon it, if everybody could have their "first love" as it is called, or rather their first fancy, the misery that is in the world would be quadrupled. The one love, the great love of life, that for ever dashes out of existence all minor *likings*, need not be *first* love: it seldom is; though, of course, it is so occasionally. I really think it was so in my case; for I cannot call my milk-and-water attachment to *Sir* Rowland Lindale *love*!—and as for Gus Pepper, and the curates—ugh!

CHAPTER XXXV.

THE BEGINNING OF THE END.

She spoke with passion after pause—"And were it wisely done,
If we, who cannot gaze above, should walk the earth alone?
If we, whose virtue is so weak, should have a will so strong;
And stand blind on the rocks, to choose the right path from
the wrong?

To choose perhaps a love-lit hearth instead of love and heaven—
A single rose, for a rose-tree which beareth seven times seven—
A rose that droppeth from the hand, and fadeth in the breast,
Until, in grieving for the worst, we learn what is the best!"
Then, breaking into tears, "Dear God!" she cried, "and must
we see

All blissful things depart from us, or e'er we go to *Thee*?
We cannot guess *Thee* in the wood, or hear *Thee* in the wind;
Our cedars fall around us, ere we see the light behind.
Ay, sooth! we feel too strong in weal to need *Thee* on the
road;

But *woe* being come, the soul is dumb that crieth not on God!"

"The Lay of the Brown Rosarie,"

By MRS. BARRETT BROWNING.

A YEAR passed away; a year, as it seemed to me,
of pure, unsullied happiness. I still wrote, and
wrote successfully; and Eric, too, achieved during
this period the most sublime and the most touching
of all his compositions. The world petted us both,
and the voice of praise came to us continually, as
we abode in our own quiet home, that was, after
all, the resting-place and the altar of our hearts.
Once or twice, as I reflected on my great happiness,
a shudder came over me: all things on earth are
mutable, and any change that might pass over the

spirit of our sweet dream of life *must* bring sadness; for the trust between us was perfect, and the love that bound us together could not be deeper or more intense; and worldly cares we had none—we were rich enough for all our needs, either actual or fancied. Surely, if change came, it must bring with it mourning and desolation.

And yet another joy was added to us. Our wedded happiness was crowned, when they laid in my arms my little Eric, our first-born child. And during the time that he and I were shut up together in the quiet twilight room, I found out that, in every feature and lineament, he resembled his father. The little doubled-up hands, with their tiny fingers, and little delicate nails, were so like those other hands, that came so often to the bedside to fold us both in one warm loving embrace; the wee rosebud of a mouth, the red little chin, the excrescence that promised to be a respectable nose in due time, and the dark, dreamy grey eyes, were all *his*—not mine. How glad I was to find my boy like his father! I believe I loved my new frail treasure more tenderly, when I thought of him as Eric's son, than when I caressed him as my own dear little baby. Since those days I have read "The Heir of Redclyffe," and how well I understand poor Amy's "Guy's own dear little girl!" But Amy's Guy was in heaven, and my Eric was with me, to share my overflowing happiness.

I got well very fast; I scarcely gave my friends a legitimate amount of anxiety; and my baby throve,

and grew so fast, and learned to know me and his father, and began to take so much notice.

He was about five months old, a beautiful boy, the admiration of the whole neighbourhood, when I came home one Sunday morning from church, and found him "fretting and wrangling," as his nurse said, as he had never done since he was born; for I often boasted that we never had a wakeful night with him, and that he slept, or crowed in our arms, or lay serenely smiling in his cot, munching his pretty, clean muslin frocks, all day long, as good as gold! I decided at once that he was beginning to teeth, and I prepared for a wearisome afternoon. But, as the day wore on, I thought his ailment seemed something more than teething, and I sent in to one of my kind neighbours who was the mother of a large family of little ones, that I might have the benefit of her opinion and advice. She did not think my boy seriously ill, but she advised me to call in medical aid, if it were only to satisfy myself and my husband; and, in the meantime, we put him in a warm bath, and agreed to keep him in one temperature, for there was something in his breathing that might be indicative of croup.

The doctor came, and to my infinite terror looked very serious: but he only said that the child was unwell with severe cold on the chest, and we must take every care that inflammation should not follow. He was to be kept in one warm even atmosphere, and he would send us proper medicines, which were to be administered with scrupulous regularity.

the remedies already applied were exactly what he should have advised himself. For four days and nights I sat with my little baby on my lap, or else I carried him to and fro in the chamber; and sometimes Eric nursed him when I was very much exhausted; but to no other arms would we consign our darling; we kept him, his father and I, till only a little waxen image, cold, and mute, and still, lay in our bereaved arms. Our darling was gone to another, and better world; and, like Rachel, I would not be comforted, because he was not.

And now, with a closer grasp, I clung to my husband; and, for my sake, he stifled his own misery—for he had passionately loved his boy—and he talked to me so gently, so lovingly, so beautifully of our darling in his happy home, that I grew calm and strong again, and tried in my turn to comfort him. I thought he needed his wife's comfort, for as I became more reconciled to my lot, he grew graver and quieter day by day; and then he was poorly, languid and tired, and yet unable to sleep, and capricious in his appetite; an entirely new phase in his existence.

It was one evening, in the very end of October, that I went to his study, to see if he were ready for tea. His work—his new poem—suspended ever since the illness of our darling, lay on the table; but he was not in his accustomed place, he was on the sofa, looking wearied and dispirited. "Milly," he said, as I went up to him, "I have been thinking, dear—"

"Well, love?"

"I have been thinking that I should like to spend the winter abroad; we both need a change, and I cannot get rid of this absurd little cough; a warmer climate will take it away immediately. Suppose we pass the winter in Rome?"

A sudden agony passed through my heart; for O! he looked so like Erica had looked at me, when she first said that she did not feel as well as usual! Was there any similarity in their constitutions, as well as in their looks, which I fancied was the case; and in the rather curious coincidence of their names. Eric and Erica! Fatal association! at least, it seemed so to me, in the nervous tremor that attacked me so suddenly. But I did not show my apprehension—O, no! I loved my Eric too well to do him harm by any selfish indulgence of my own feelings. I sat down by him, and talked over our probable journey, and the needful preparations, with every appearance of calmness, and every demonstration of interest; but O! with such a strange sinking at my heart, such a thrilling of every nerve, and such a longing to be alone, that I might shed a sea of passionate tears, and cry wildly to God to spare him, my treasure, my idolized husband! And even as I sat there, with my arm linked in his, and our hands clasped, and his beautiful clear eyes looking straight into mine, as if he would have said—

"Look through mine eyes with thine, true wife;
Round my true heart thine arms entwine;
My other dearer life in life,
Look through my very soul with thine!"—

even then, the wild, voiceless cry went up, as it would pierce the heavens, with the passion and intensity of its silent supplication—"O God! take what thou wilt away; take wealth, take health, take comfort, take friends, take good name, take *all*; but leave *him*—my life, my world, my own soul!"

And he never knew the agony that was rending my heart; and I did not know, till months afterwards, how *his* calmness was only in outward seeming, lest he should alarm me; for that very day he had seen one of our most celebrated physicians, and he had been told that in England he would die before the spring. We soon laid our plans, and our preparations were quickly completed; and one grey November morning found us at London-bridge, bidding adieu to my father, and Mrs. Kendrick, ere the steamer started on her way.

Of the journey I say nothing; only as we travelled further and further south, the fogs and mists and raw damps that we had left behind us were exchanged for azure skies, balmy airs, and glorious sunshine. But it made me think of that other time, when, with Erica by my side, I had traversed the same genial latitudes—alas, I feared, in the same vain search after strength restored, and life renewed. We paid a passing visit to the place where my darling pupil lay at rest, and we spent several pleasant days at Genoa—that city of dull palaces—"Genova la Superba." From thence we took steamer to Civita Vecchia, the nearest seaport to Rome.

What a journey it was ! the deep blue skies overhead, and the deep blue waves of the sparkling Mediterranean around us ; here and there a graceful sail, flitting, like the snowy wing of a sea-bird, over the sunny waters ; in the fast-receding background, the lovely "Sunrise Shore," the purple hills behind, and the grey cliffs ; and beyond all, the cloud-like Alps, rising, white and spectral, far, far up into the deep cerulean air. And then, further on, the winding shore, with its olive groves and its vineyards, and here and there quaint old towers, grey and grim, each one with its fortress-tower frowning on some embattled, almost inaccessible eminence ; and here and there, as we stood further out to sea, a faint glimpse of the distant Appennines ; and last of all, in the brilliant morning sunshine, the long-stretching ramparts of Civita Vecchia. And then, when the last *paulo* had been exacted and paid, the long journey by carriage to the Imperial City, the winding road skirting the shore, the bare and uncultivated lands, that would have been ugly save for the sweet sunshine, that lighted up everything, and kindled at every turning fresh hues of gladness and beauty ; here and there lonely ruins, now a mouldering fortress, now a broken tower keeping mournful watch on some solitary height, overlooking the sea ; and by-and-by the Campagna, the desolate Campagna itself, so full of interest, so replete with old histories and legends of the half-forgotten past. The mournful Campagna, the *silent waste* that girdles within her mysterious

bosom the dethroned Mistress of the World! In the calm, rich afternoon light, we reached our journey's end. "Roma! Roma!" shouted the postillions, as postillions crossing the Campagna always do shout; and there she lay before us;—beautiful, ancient, faded, mournful Rome! There were turrets and cupolas, and there—that *must* be the dome of St. Peter's! Yes, another minute, and we were within the Porta, driving along, near the mighty colonnades of the great cathedral church; across the Tiber, through the antique streets, till we reached our destination, and found ourselves inmates of a Roman habitation. Why do I linger over this time? Why do I write about what every one knows? for every one who approaches the Eternal City sees the same landscape, and those who have never seen it know it well by description. I linger over my first impressions of Rome, because they were so fair and bright, notwithstanding my many misgivings; and because the days were at hand, when the gorgeous Italian sky, and the magnificent sunlight, and the grey ruins of an antique world, could charm no longer. I might tell you a great deal about the Christmas week in Rome, the great festival of the Roman winter; how we saw the Pope, with the glittering tiara on his head, and his robes all bright with precious gems; how we beheld his guard of honour, his cardinals, his bishops, and his priests, in their white and purple garments: how we heard the most glorious music, solemn, sweet, and soul-subduing; how the incense wreathed itself into fragrant

clouds beneath the golden dome ; and how everybody—that is, the ecclesiastical bodies—knelt and rose and knelt again, and bowed, and scraped, till I could not help repeating the lines, quoted by Dr. Kip on a similar occasion :—

“Never, I ween,
In anybody’s recollection,
Was such a party seen
For genuflexion !”

I might tell you how we gazed on the mighty arches of the ruined Coliseum ; how we trod the weed-grown floors of the Palace of the Cæsars ; how we visited churches whose wealth fairly dazzled the senses, and how we learned to know, as familiar paths, the ancient streets of Rome, with their tall, solemn houses, and their shrines in every corner ; but all this has been enlarged upon, again and again ; and it is my own history, not a book of travels, that I am writing.

Through the depth of winter—if winter it could be called under those smiling skies—my husband’s strength seemed to be restored, and he returned to his beloved occupation with redoubled zest. We began to lay plans for the coming spring and summer : we had no very stringent duties at home, and we resolved to extend our travels ; to see Naples and Southern Italy ; to return northwards through Florence, Padua, and Venice ; and to explore the Tyrol and Switzerland, before we turned our faces in good earnest towards British shores. But, towards the end of February, the bad symptoms returned

with aggravated force, and it became necessary to seek medical counsel without delay. Our kind physician had given us an introduction to one of the most skilful men in Rome, and we made haste to avail ourselves of the advantage. The doctor came and visited us, and he carefully examined my husband, and gave us some general directions, but he said nothing as to the nature of his malady; I soon knew why—alleviation was all that earthly care and earthly skill could supply. The fiat had gone forth; nothing could save my ~~Eric~~ from an early grave.

No, nothing! My pleasant dream of happiness was over; my bark was once more among the quicksands; the crowning sorrow of my life was come—the sorrow out of which was to spring up joy unspeakable and eternal. One day, we were in the Protestant burial-ground, sitting on one of the higher terraces, very near the tomb of Shelley, with its touching “Cor Cordium,” and its Shaksperian lines; when Eric said very quietly—he had been silent for some minutes—“Milly, dear, when I leave you, let me stay here; don’t take me, or rather what is left of me, back to England; I should like to lie down here among these sweet flowers and fragrant weeds, under the shadow of that ancient tomb!”

Till that moment, though I knew it, I had not *realized* the truth. I could not believe that the light of my eyes would be taken from me; and till then Eric had never spoken of himself as dying. But now the veil was swept away, and I stood, as

it were, face to face with Death. And *he* to die! he, so gifted, so beautiful, so good, so kind! over whose head two-and-thirty springs had not yet shed their tender freshness. Oh! could it be? must it be?

That night, when he was asleep, I stole away from his side, that I might go to another room, and weep and pray there without restraint. O! how mockingly came the sweet moonlight through the myrtle boughs! How coldly it shone on, over dome and tower, and the green Sabine hills, and the dim mountains of the Abruzzi, while I knelt there in my agony and despair! No! the prayer that had gone up in all its wild, unsanctified passion, ever since that October evening, in our own dear home—the home we were never to share again—was not to be answered. I was to be left alone in a lonely empty world. “Then,” I cried, “if he may not be spared to me, fit him, O Father! for the mighty change; make him worthy of Thee; teach him how to die; since Thou takest him from my side, take him to Thyself! O! for Thy dear Son’s sake, make him meet for Thine everlasting kingdom!” And then I added, faintly and half hopelessly, “and O! teach *me* THY love; make *me* Thy faithful child!”

Was it reality, or did I dream? Back, like a flood of thought upon my mind, came the memory of the truths heard, but uncomprehended, in days long past; once more I heard Mr. Clarenham in the stage coach, saying, “Believe in the Lord

Jesus Christ, and *thou shalt be saved.*" I heard again the last words of Mr. Ryland, as repeated to me by Nurse Dent, "I have erred and strayed; but I have a good hope—a *sure* hope—for it is fixed on my Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ." Ah! what a thrill of love and wonder ran through my heart as I murmured that thrice-holy name! I thought, too, of the old coffin-nail maker, who closed his eyes, singing to himself his favourite hymn—

"Worthy the Lamb, our lips reply,
For He was slain for us;"

and woke up to join the chorus of "Worthy is the Lamb" in heaven. And once again I seemed to stand in that darkening chamber at the old Castle House, while dying lips said to me, "None ever perished at His feet, so I will kneel there, more than content to go into heaven together with publicans and harlots. I have put my trust in Him; therefore, I shall not be confounded." And, again—

"Fear, doubt, and anguish take their flight,
His glory now is ris'n on me;
Mine eyes shall His salvation see—
'Tis evening-time, and *there is light.*"

And that last faint, clear whisper, "Through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Yes; I understood it all now. The light shone into my long-darkened heart; the day-star had arisen; no clouds or storms could ever obscure its unfading splendour. *I believed*; nay, it seemed something more than belief—I saw Jesus Christ; my

soul had a vision of His glory and of His loveliness; and I sank at His feet in adoration, and awe, and bliss unspeakable. Yes; God would take away my beloved one, but He gave me His own dear Son.

The morning light was streaming into the room, when my husband, missing me, came to my side, to know why I had risen so early. I told him all that had passed. I said that I had found HIM of whom Moses and the prophets wrote—Jesus Christ, the Crucified, the Exalted—the Man of Sorrows, the King of Glory! Long we talked, till the spring sunshine beamed full and warm on that beautiful ruined City; and I strove to show to my Eric the wondrous love and incomparable glory that had so won my rebel heart. And God blessed my words—or rather He revealed Himself to His servant, who was rapidly passing from things of this world. Before another morning we could sing together—

“Worthy the Lamb, our lips reply,
For He was slain for us.”

CHAPTER XXXVI.

RESTING IN JESUS.

Thou art in heaven, and I am still on earth;
'Tis years, long years, since we were parted here;
I still a wanderer amid grief and fear,
And thou, the tenant of a brighter sphere:
Yet still thou seemest near;
But yesterday it seems
Since the last clasp was given,
Since our lips met,
And our eyes looked into each other's depths.

H. BONAR.

SWIFTLY passed away the days of that sweet spring time, those last days of earthly communion; but into them seemed poured the love, the joy—yes! the solemn joy of a life-time. We were one now in the Lord; the union begun in this world would be consummated in heaven; henceforth, nothing could really sever us, for death may sometimes mar, but never break up, “the communion of saints.” And our hearts were still: he waiting for the Master’s call; I waiting for the hour when my beloved one would be borne away, for a brief while, from my aching sight and my empty arms. At last I had found my rest; and on that sure foundation my soul could rejoice, although trembling with bitter woe and agony.

My Eric mourned most of all, over his wasted life, as he deemed it: God had given him one of

the sweetest and highest of gifts—the gift of song—and he had not consecrated it to the Giver. Never had his lyre been attuned to heavenly music; never had it resounded with the praises of the Saviour; and now he would fain have uttered, in his own most lovely way, the joy of his heart, and the thanksgiving, the hope, and the sense of pardon that filled his soul. Some verses he did write—precious fragments, that are among my best treasures; but he had neither strength nor leisure for composition. O! how he exhorted me not to sink down in stupor and inaction, when he should be taken from me; not to sorrow, as they who have no hope. “You must not be idle, darling,” he said; “you must work while it is day. You are young yet, not thirty years old: you have health and talent; consecrate them to God’s service. Be content, my sweet wife, to spend, if it please Him, a long life in the Master’s service: toil cheerfully on in the vineyard, till the words are spoken, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant.’ I shall never do my Lord good service on earth; but perhaps, in that world to which I am going, I may be permitted still to do something for my Master; for it is written, ‘And His servants shall serve Him.’”

“‘And they shall see His face, and His name shall be in their foreheads, and there shall be no night there,’” I replied, longing, as I spoke, to go with him to that land whose confines I also seemed to be treading. It was a selfish longing: I wanted the repose without the toil, the crown without the

cross. Not yet must I lay down the burden of the flesh, for the Master was saying to me, "Go, work in My vineyard;" and it behoved me to do His bidding, cheerfully, humbly, and patiently, knowing that in His own good time "He giveth his beloved rest."

All too soon the parting came—too soon for my poor breaking heart; none too soon for him whose rest was already won; none too soon for the angels, who were waiting to carry home the ransomed spirit. It was a glorious April day, clearer and warmer and fairer than our fairest midsummer, when my Eric left me:—

"I have it yet, about my heart,
The beauty of that day,
As if the robe thou wert to wear
In other climes were given,
That I might to learn to know thee there,
And find thee out in heaven."

Find thee out, my Eric? There will be no need for that. Thy face will be the first to welcome me on the heavenly shore. I know thou wilt be there, waiting for me as I cross the billows of Jordan, that together we may kneel at His feet, who washed us from our sins in his own blood, and made us priests and kings unto God.

When the morning sun rose on that transcendently beautiful day, I was keeping watch through the last hours of my husband's fading life; and when far over the desolate Campagna the sun went down, leaving its purpling hues on the lonely, ferny waste—I was a widow.

A widow! no tongue can tell the desolation of those words!

He was too weak at the last to say much, but every whispered word was thanksgiving and praise. I watched the light fade out from those beautiful eyes; I watched the deathly pallor steal over cheek and brow and lip; I watched the shadow that comes but once on mortal face, fall on those loved features—and I did not sink, for God was with me. His last look was mine; the last faint clasp of the thin, moist fingers were upon mine; the last words that were given to earth were mine; and the last kiss—and then—

“O God! to clasp those fingers close,
And yet to feel so lonely!
To see a light on dearest brows,
Which is the daylight only!”

A day or two more, and I stood in the burying-ground, beneath the ancient sepulchre of Caius Cestius, and heard a voice, that spoke the familiar language of my far-off country, saying, “Forasmuch as it hath pleased Almighty God of His great mercy to take unto Himself the soul of our dear brother here departed, we therefore commit his body to the ground: earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust; in sure and certain hope of the resurrection to eternal life; through our Lord Jesus Christ.” And there we left those mortal remains, to rest in hope till the morning of the resurrection; and surely never was precious clay left to sweeter repose. Everywhere the flowers were springing in freshest

beauty, and fragrant shrubs perfumed every gentle zephyr; the low wind whispered in trees that overgrew the ancient sepulchre, and the calm sunshine lay on tomb, and branch, and blossom, and on the soft green grass, and on the time-worn pyramid of Cestius, that has stood there, as Rogers says, "till the language spoken about it has changed; and the shepherd born at its foot can read its inscription no longer." Solemn, beautiful cemetery! Fitting place of rest for one like my Eric, whose soul lived in all fair scenes, and sweet sounds, and holy mournful memories. And yet I never think of *him* as lying there in the quiet earth—it is not he, only the worn-out garment of the flesh, laid by in the safe wardrobe of the grave till the glorified spirit needs once more the form and face of other years. *He* is far away in the land where the children of the kingdom behold the King in His beauty, where they see Him "face to face." Far away, and yet so near—nearer to me than any earthly friend, near me in the sunshiny mornings, in the dim twilight, and in the solemn midnight hour; near me in joy, in sorrow, in my labour for Christ's sake, and in my hour of rest. Always, always near me, is my Eric, the husband of my love, my other self, who has gone before me to the heavenly country. "*I believe in the communion of saints.*"

I had no fears that the love I prized so much was lost; I never dreamed of *love* dying with the frail, fleshly tabernacle. I knew it was living on, though for a brief season I might not receive its

manifestations. Before me lies a volume of Mrs. Hemans' poetry, and these lines meet my eye, as I open the book:—

“And if the love, which here was passing *light*,
Went with what died not—O! that *this* we knew,
But this! that through the silence of the night
Some voice of all the lost ones, and the true,
Would speak, and say, if in their fair repose
We are yet aught of what we were to those
We call the *dead*! Their passionate adieu,
Was it but breath to perish? Holier trust
Be mine! Thy love is there, but purified from dust.”

Yes, that is it, my Eric; “purified from dust,” deeper, stronger, purer, firmer, and fuller, than mortal heart can conceive. There is something to my mind very beautiful in the way Mrs. Hemans speaks of those whom “we call the dead.” In another of her loveliest poems she says:—

“The dead!
The only beautiful who change no more,
The only loved, the dwellers on the shore
Of spring fulfilled! The dead! *whom* call we so?
They that breathe purer air, that feel, that know
Things wrapt from us.”

Truly spoken of all the dead in Christ, of all those whose bodies yet tarry in the quiet, solemn chambers of the grave; while *they*, the spirits that animated the faded, mouldering clay, stand before the throne of God, clothed in white, with palms in their hands, crying, “Worthy is the Lamb that was slain.”

Dear friends, do you often think of that wondrous multitude that no man can number? What a gathering it must be! The assemblies of the saints below are very sweet and glorious, and they fill our

hearts with holy fire, and animate the souls that were faint and weary with doing and suffering. But what will it be to be there ? as the sweet hymn asks. What will it be to hold communion with angels and archangels, and the spirits of just men made perfect—with Enoch, who walked with God ; with the Father of the Faithful ; with Moses, the servant of the Lord ; with the Shepherd King of Israel ; with all the prophets of ancient time ere the Desire of all nations was made flesh and dwelt among men ; with Paul, the master-mind of that early day ; with the fervent Peter ; with John the beloved ; with Polycarp and all the noble army of martyrs ; with Luther, and Milton, and Cromwell, great stars that shine through the darkness of the records of the past ; with the departed saints of later time, Arnold, Chalmers, Bickersteth, John Angell James ? With all who loved the Lord Jesus Christ ; with all who yet serve him here below ; and above all, and first of all, with the King and Master Himself ; with Jesus, who loved us, and washed us from our sins in His own blood—with Him, and with all His saints and angels, for ever and ever !

I did not hasten home, although Rome was in anything but a peaceable condition ; and just as the spring was melting into summer, Mrs. Kendrick and my father joined me ; and the heat being now nearly insupportable, and the malaria tainting the atmosphere of the city, we concluded to go away into the country, far from the political tumults and

the murmurs of war that were surging throughout the ancient metropolis. So we travelled onwards towards the Appennines, and there we found what we sought—a little grey town, at the mountain's foot, girdled in from forest and ravine by its olive woods and its fair vineyards. And through its midst ran a bright stream, that made music day and night, as it came tumbling down from the solitary heights above; and many little singing rills ran through the gardens, and the vineyards, and helped to join the melody, the chorus of rustling foliage, and low, soft winds, and murmuring waters, and church bells, and the sweet voices of the children of the Abruzzi, at play on the pleasant hills. And there we quietly passed the summer, and I recovered the strength that had been greatly impaired, and began to wish for England again, that I might begin the work that I had planned out, the work that my husband had charged me to do. So when the autumn came, and just as the first snows began to whiten the high mountain-peaks, we bade adieu to our kind friends in the little town, and returned to Rome. There all was bustle, and fear, and secret sedition. We only tarried to see that the tablet which I had ordered for Eric's grave was properly executed, and we paid one last visit to the mighty Coliseum, and then turned away from Papal soil, to seek our own free, happy, enlightened English shore.

I went back to my own house at once—ah! that was saddest of all. There were his books, and his cabinets, and his papers; his very chair, standing

in its accustomed place, as though waiting his pleasure. Ah! nevermore would he sit there penning the beautiful thoughts, and creating the lovely ideals, that had won him the garland of fame; nevermore would his voice be heard in those solitary familiar chambers. But was he not singing a more glorious song than the sweetest poet-lay that ever issued from mortal lips? and did he not wear a brighter crown than any laurel wreath the world could give? Those first few days, in my home, dwelling alone where he had been ever by my side, were the most painful of my widowhood. And there was my boy's cradle too, and his rattle and ring, and his little garments—all records of the joy that had passed away. I found it harder to say "Thy will be done," than when I laid my Eric in his quiet resting-place—harder than I ever found it afterwards. Thank God I could say it: *He* gave me strength.

Then I set about my work. I felt as if I had to do, not only my own share, but that which my husband would have done, had he lived to serve the Saviour, whom he never knew till the day of labour on earth had reached its close. I began to write again, for now I felt that I must consecrate my talent to God. Henceforth through all my writings must there run a vein of gold; a streamlet of pure and living waters; a Name that is above every other name in heaven or on earth. I wrote no longer for fame, nor for the mere love of my work, for I did love it right well—but, as I humbly trusted,

under God's blessing, for *usefulness*. If I may but lead one sinner to Jesus Christ, great will be my reward; I shall be well repaid for hours of toil and weariness.

And I have other work to do—work in my family, among my nephews and nieces, for Rose has so many children that Mrs. Kendrick is sure she cannot always tell how many, without counting them on her fingers; and Susan—Mrs. John Wilson—bids fair to follow in her sister's steps. We are all *one* now; one in heart, and one in hope and aim—my sisters and their husbands, my father and my dear excellent step-mother, and, by God's grace, my unworthy self. We are all striving to do our Master's bidding, and looking to heaven as our final home, whither He Himself will lead us, when our tasks of love are duly performed.

There is my work, too, in the Church. Soon after my return from Italy, I joined a church, not far from my own home, whose members I had known and respected in my happy wedded life. I am so blessed in my church relations! I have such a dear circle of Christian friends—and *such* a pastor! His ministry is one of the greatest blessings I enjoy; but he will have no idle members; all, who are what he graphically calls "able-minded and able-bodied," are expected to take their share in the work of the church of which they form a portion. I must tell you the text he has given us for our New Year's motto; and, if you will let me, I should very much like to give it to you, my dear friends

and readers, entreating you to put away all slothfulness, and selfishness, and, without any further tarrying, to adopt it as your own—"ARISE, SHINE!"

There is so much to do in the world, and so little time wherein to do it; and the day is far spent; and the night cometh, when no man can work. Shall we not "arise" from our sinful inaction, our self-seeking, our sole devotion to our own interests; and say, with humble heart and ready hand, "Lord, what wilt Thou have *me* to do?"

There is work for all, even for the humblest and the hardest-pressed; there is more to do now than there ever was before, and of course less time for the doing; and it may be—it *will be* to *some* who read these pages—their last year in this world.

I have finished my story now. I have shown you how I tried in vain to be satisfied and happy without *true religion*, which means an interest in Christ, pardon for sin, a living faith in His precious blood, and His Divine merits, and, as an inevitable result, conformity to His will and devotion to His service. Long, long I sought for happiness, and found it not; till at length my eyes were opened, and I saw wherein I had erred, and where alone true joy was to be found. I beseech you, take this truth into your hearts—*There is no happiness out of God—no peace but in Christ Jesus*. Finding Him, we find all things, and till we do find Him, we are as ships on dangerous shoals, without pilot, or helm, or compass. Finding Him, we secure happiness for ever; for nothing can

part us from Him,—no change, or sorrow, or exile, or pain, or weariness, or even death itself. No! death is but the dawn of that better, higher life, that we shall live with Jesus Christ for evermore. *This* life is the true *night*—death is the breaking of the morning—eternity is the full noon-day.

And now, farewell! May what I have written not be in vain; I have asked God to bless it, and I think He will. I am very happy, doing my own work and my husband's, and waiting for the time when it shall please God to call me home likewise. Then I shall see my lost ones once more—my beloved aunt, my mother, my Erica, my little child, and before them all my Eric!

Yes, my husband; I know you are very near me; anon we shall clasp hands. I am waiting cheerfully, and full of joy, till the Master shall tell me that I have accomplished His will on earth, and I am "made meet for the inheritance of the saints in light." Till then "I press toward the mark;" and when my heart is faint, and the sweet memories of other days awaken that vain yearning that all must know, whose best beloved have gone before, I comfort myself, and still the aching pain, by singing that precious hymn of faith and hope, with which I began this chapter:—

"Thou art among the deathless, I still here,
Amid things mortal in a land of graves—
A land o'er which the heavy-beating waves
Of changing time move on; a land, where raves
The storm which whoso braves

Must have his anchor fixed
Firmly within the veil:
So let my anchor be;
Such be my consolation, and my hope.

Thou art among the sorrowless, I here
Amid the sorrowing; and yet not long
Shall I remain 'mid sin, and fear, and wrong;
Soon shall I join you in your deathless song.
Thy day has come, not gone;
Thy sun has risen, not set;
Thy life is now beyond
The reach of death or change,
Not ended, but begun.
Such shall my life be soon,
And then—the meeting day,
How full of light and joy!
All fear of change cast out,
All shadows passed away,
The union sealed for ever
Between us and our Lord.”

Farewell, dear friends! may God bless you, and
lead all of you, who have found it not, to the one
true Source of earthly and EVERLASTING HAPPINESS!

THE END.





[REDACTED]

